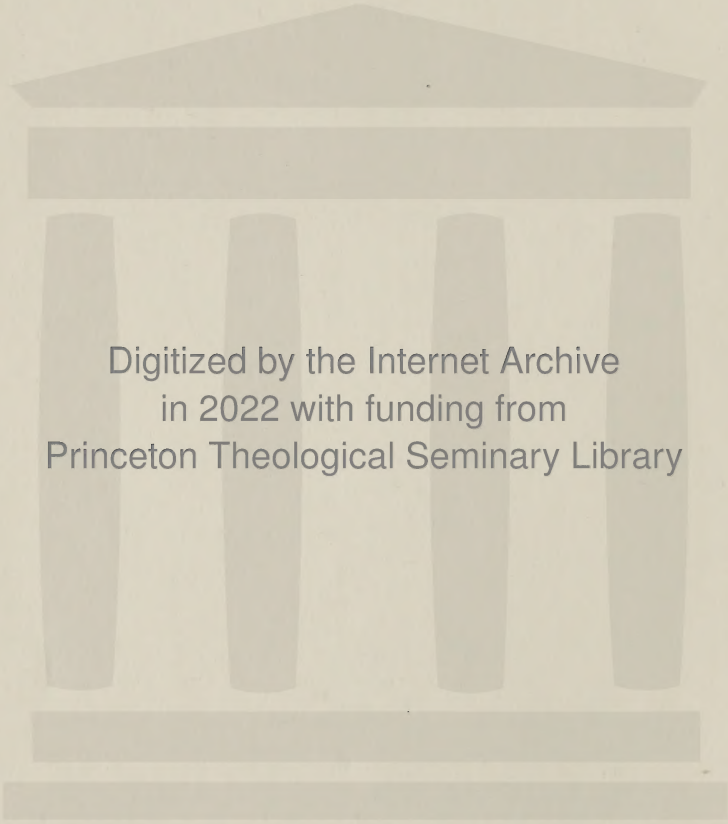

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

OR

SONG OF THE BLESSED ONE

INDIA'S FAVORITE BIBLE

INTERPRETED BY

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To the memory of my friend and colleague

MORRIS JASTROW, JR.

In grateful remembrance of his unselfish and unfailing friendship.

Contents

Foreword

Although the Bhagavad Gītā belongs in a peculiar sense to one sect of Vishnuites, the "Bhāgavatas," it is not unfair to call it the favorite sacred book of the Hindus as a whole. It is popular with them in every sense. Not to know it means among them almost what it would mean for an English-speaking person not to know the Bible. It has permeated the collective religious consciousness of the people, from one end of India to the other. Hence, it is very important for an understanding of Hindu culture, and especially of Hindu religion. And at the present moment the historic culture and religious thought of India ought to be a matter of great interest to the whole world, if only because of their relation to what is called the Gandhi movement.

The remarkable personality of Mohandas Gandhi, and the popular movement headed by him, have aroused among westerners more interest in India, perhaps, than has ever existed in the past. But it is not so well known, and therefore should be emphasized, that this movement is a thoroughly indigenous one, firmly rooted in the soil of India. That is, no doubt, one reason for its effective hold upon the people. Gandhi's ideas and ideals, his principles and his practice, are characteristically Hindu. Not that he is naïvely or bigotedly chauvinistic. He is highly educated in western as well as in Hindu thought and culture. He is also tolerant and broad-minded; he would certainly not claim for India a monopoly of truth. I think it unlikely that he has ever, either consciously or unconsciously, rejected an idea because it originated in the west, or adopted one because it was native to India. He has, in fact, shown a marked ability to learn from any source; observers of his career have pointed out that his ideas have developed and altered materially in the course of years. But the striking thing in this development is that it has constantly tended towards a more and more complete identification with the highest forms of historic Hinduism.

I have no doubt that Mahatma Gandhi would decline to accept some doctrines expressed in the Gītā. And any sectarian tag seems almost unworthy of his free and noble spirit. Yet he is a Vishnuite if he is anything sectarian. And in any case he certainly knows his Gītā, and would be the first to acknowledge his debt to it. It would perhaps be a safe guess that no other work has had a larger influence on this great leader of present-day India. Certainly none has had a larger influence on the development of Hindu religious thought, of which the "Gandhi movement" is a true child. This gives to the Gītā a special interest and importance at the present moment.

I hope that my book may be timely for yet another reason. There are in this country at present a number of religious sects of recent origin which derive many of their doctrines from Hinduism. Some of these sects revere the Bhagavad Gītā almost or quite as much as do the Hindus themselves. And largely through their influence its name, at least, has become more or less familiar to wider circles. Both to the adherents of such sects, and to those wider circles, it may be of interest to discover what the Gītā's words mean to a professional Indologist.

To be sure, there are already in existence numerous translations of the Gītā, both scholarly and popular, sectarian and non-sectarian. Two or three which I consider the most dependable are named in the Appendix to this book. But it is doubtful whether many persons who are not already familiar with Hindu thought would get much out of even the best possible translation of this work. It is unsystematic—one may fairly say helter-skelter—in its arrangement. It often contradicts itself, or at least seems to do so. And above all it presupposes a complete familiarity with many commonplaces of Hindu life and thought, which of course are by no means commonplaces to us.

In this book, I have tried to let the Gītā speak for itself as far as practicable. I have quoted from it extensively, and in particular have taken pains to set forth all its most important doctrines in its own words.* But its materials are arranged more systematically, and are set in a running comment of my own,—which I have tried to keep objective; I hope that I have usually suppressed my personal beliefs and prejudices. A historical background has been furnished, in the shape of a brief outline of the development of Hindu religious thought from the earliest recorded times to the time of the

* Or, more precisely, in English renditions of its words as I understand them. All quotations in this book have been translated by me, except in one case, where credit is given to the translator quoted.

Gītā. This is designed to make clear the intellectual environment in which the Gītā was produced. I hope that for these reasons my book may be a more satisfactory introduction to the Gītā, and through it to Hinduism in general, than the original work or any translation.

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Pronunciation of Sanskrit Words

The spelling of Sanskrit words used in this book has been partially simplified and adapted for English-speaking persons.

No diacritical marks are used except the macron over long vowels; this is printed over *a, i,* and *u* when they are long, because it is sometimes important to know the length of vowels in order to determine the place of the accent. The vowels *e* and *o* are always long, and so, since the macron is unnecessary on them, it is usually omitted; this custom I have followed. It is customary in this country to accent the penult of Sanskrit words when the penult is long, otherwise the antepenult. A syllable is long if it contains a long vowel or diphthong, or if its vowel is followed by more than one consonant (as in Greek and Latin). The letter *h* when it occurs after another consonant (in all words used in this book) does not count as a consonant in determining the length of a syllable.

The vowels are pronounced substantially as in German or Italian. The following are their approximate English equivalents:

ā = *a* in father
a (short) = the same sound shortened**
e (always long) = *ay* in way
ī = *i* in machine
i (short) = *i* in pin
o (always long) = *o* in go
ū = *u* in rule
u (short) = *u* in full

Diphthongs

ai = *ai* in aisle au = *ou* in loud

The consonants as written in this book are to be pronounced for the most part as in English. Note that *j* = English *j*, *ch* = English *ch* (as in church), *sh* = English *sh*. But *g* is always "hard," as in English get (never "soft" as in gin).

The letter *h* after another consonant (except *c* or *s*) is to be pronounced as an aspiration, separate from the preceding consonant. Thus *bh* is pronounced in a manner approaching the sound of *bh* in English abhor; *th* (not like English *th* in this or thin, but) in a manner approaching the sound of *th* in English anthill.

** The Hindus of the present day pronounce short *a* nearly like English *u* in but. Some English-speaking people give it the sound of English *a* in man.

FIRST PART

PRELIMINARY CHAPTERS

CHAPTER I

Introductory

TO MOST good Vishnuites, the Bhagavad Gītā is what the New Testament is to good Christians. It is their chief devotional book. In it many millions of Hindus have for centuries found their principal source of religious inspiration.

In form, it consists mainly of a long dialog, which is almost a monolog. The principal speaker is Krishna, who in his human aspect is merely one of the secondary heroes of the Mahābhārata, the great Hindu epic. But, according to the Gītā itself, he is in truth a manifestation of the Supreme Deity in human form. Hence the name—the Song (*gītā*) of the Blessed One or the Lord (*Bhagavad*). The other speaker in the dialog is Arjuna, one of the five sons of Pāndu who are the principal heroes of the Mahābhārata. The conversation between Arjuna and Krishna is supposed to take place just before the battle which is the main theme of the great epic. Krishna is acting as Arjuna's charioteer. Arjuna sees in the ranks of the opposing army a large number of his own kinsmen and intimate friends. He is horror-stricken at the thought of fighting against them, and forthwith lays down his weapons, saying he would rather be killed than kill them. Krishna replies, justifying the fight on various grounds, the chief of which is that man's real self or soul is immortal and independent of the body; it "neither kills nor is killed"; it has no part in either the actions or the sufferings of the body. In response to further questions by Arjuna, he gradually develops views of life and destiny as a whole, which it is the purpose of this book to explain. In the course of the exposition he declares himself to be the Supreme Godhead, and reveals to Arjuna, as a special act of grace, a vision of his mystic supernal form. All this apparently goes on while the two armies stand drawn up in battle array, waiting to attack each other. This dramatic absurdity need not con-

cern us seriously. It is clear that the Bhagavad Gītā was not a part of the original epic narrative. It was probably composed, and certainly inserted in its present position, by a later interpolator.[1] To be sure, he must have had in mind the dramatic situation in which he has placed the Gītā, for he repeatedly makes reference to it. But these references are purely formal and external; they do not concern the essentials of the work. We must think of the Gītā primarily as a unit, complete in itself, without reference to its surroundings. Its author, or whoever placed it in its present position, was interested chiefly in the religious doctrines to be set forth, not in external dramatic forms.

This is not to say that the author was lacking in artistic power. He was, on the contrary, a poet of no mean capacity. Indeed, we must think of his work as a poem: a religious, devotional poem. Its appeal is to the emotions rather than to the intellect. It follows that in order to understand the Gītā one must have a certain capacity for understanding its poetic, emotional point of view. One must be able and willing to adopt the poet's attitude: to feel with him. I say, to feel with him: not necessarily to think with him. It is possible to understand and enjoy sympathetically a poetic expression of an emotional attitude without sharing the poet's intellectual opinions. Philosophically speaking, the attitude of the Gītā is mystical. A mystic would probably prefer to say that it appeals to the mystic intuition, rather than to the emotions, as I put it. That is a question of terms, or perhaps better of philosophic outlook. My mystic critic would at any rate agree that it does not appeal to the reasoning faculty of the mind. The "opinions" which it presupposes or sets forth are not so much "opinions" in the intellectual sense as emotional—or, let us say if you like, intuitional—points of view. They are not supported by logic; they are simply proclaimed, as immediately perceived by the soul, or revealed by the grace of God. It is not my purpose to discuss their validity. That would indeed be futile. To the mystic they are above reason, to the rationalist below it; to both they are disconnected with it. Either you accept them immediately, without argument, or you do not. Argument will not

[1] Such interpolations are numerous in the Mahābhārata; so numerous that we may fairly regard them as a regular habit. The great epic early attained such prestige among the Hindus that later authors were eager to win immortality for their works by framing them in so distinguished a setting. The author of the Bhagavad Gītā merely followed a custom which was not only common, but seemed to the Hindu mind entirely natural and innocent. The Hindus of ancient times had little notion of what we consider the rights of authorship. To their minds any literary composition belonged to the world, not to its author.

move you in either case. But even a convinced rationalist, if he has some power of poetic appreciation, can follow much of the Gītā's presentation with sympathy, the sort of sympathy which would be inspired in him by any exalted poetry. The Gītā is poetic not only in formal expression, but in the ideas expressed. In both respects it may claim the attention of all but those who are so dominated by their opinions that they cannot appreciate noble ideas nobly expressed when they have a different intellectual background.

The poetic inspiration found in many of the Gītā's thoughts[2] can hardly be fully appreciated unless they are presented in a poetic form. We are fortunate in having a beautiful English rendering by Sir Edwin Arnold, from which those who cannot read Sanskrit may get, on the whole, a good idea of the living spirit of the poem. It takes a poet to reproduce poetry. Arnold was a poet, and a very gifted one. My own function is that of an analytic commentator; a more humble function, but one which has its uses, particularly in the case of a work that was produced in a place and at a time so remote from us.

This remoteness in time and scene makes exceptionally important one of the critic's duties: that of making clear the historical setting of his author. As every author, even the most inspired of poets and prophets, is a product of his environment, so we cannot understand the Bhagavad Gītā without knowing something of the ideas which flourished in its native land, during and before its time. It was composed in India, in Sanskrit, the ancient sacred and literary language of Brahmanic civilization. We do not know its author's name (indeed, almost all the early literature of India is anonymous). Nor can we date it with any accuracy; all that we can say is that it was probably composed before the beginning of our era, but not more than a few centuries before it. We do know this: it was preceded by a long literary and intellectual activity, covering perhaps a thousand years, and reaching back to the hymns of the Rig Veda itself, the oldest monument of Hindu literature. And the Gītā's thoughts are rooted in those of this older literature. It was born out of the same intellectual environment; it expresses largely the same ideas, often in the same or similar language. It quotes from older works a number of stanzas and parts of stanzas. There are few important ideas expressed in the Gītā which cannot be paralleled from more ancient works. Its originality of thought consists mainly in a dif-

[2] Not all of them; it must be confessed that the Gītā is frequently commonplace in both thought and expression.

ference of emphasis, in a fuller development of some inherited ideas, and in some significant omissions of ideas which were found in its sources.

It is equally true, though less important for our purposes, that the Bhagavad Gītā itself has had an enormous influence on later Hindu religious literature. It has even had some influence on European and American literature of the last century, during which it became known to the western world. To mention one instance: a verse found in the Gītā was imitated by Emerson in the first verse of his poem on "Brahma":

> If the red slayer think he slays,
> Or if the slain think he is slain,
> They know not well the subtle ways
> I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Compare Bhagavad Gītā 2, 19 (Arnold's translation):

> He who shall say, "Lo! I have slain a man!"
> He who shall think, "Lo! I am slain!" those both
> Know naught! Life cannot slay. Life is not slain!

To be sure, this stanza is not original with the Gītā; it is quoted from the Katha Upanishad. It is more likely, however, that Emerson got it from the Gītā than from the less well-known Upanishad text. But the later influence of the Gītā lies outside the scope of this volume. I shall content myself with setting forth the thoughts of the Gītā and their origins.

Especially close is the connection between the Bhagavad Gītā and the class of works called Upanishads. These are the earliest extensive treatises dealing with philosophical subjects in India. About a dozen of them, at least, are older than the Gītā, whose author knew and quoted several. The Gītā itself is sometimes regarded as an Upanishad, and has quite as good a right to the title as many later works that are so called.[3] All the works properly called Upanishads have this, and only this, in common, that they contain mainly speculations on some or all of the following topics: the nature of the universe, its origin, purpose, and guiding principle; the nature of man, his physical and mental and spiritual constitution, his duty, his destiny, and his relation to the rest of the universe, particularly to the guiding principle thereof, whether conceived personally or

[3] The word *upanishad* may be translated "secret, mystic doctrine"; it is a title that is often claimed by all sorts of works, some of which hardly deserve to be called philosophical in any sense.

impersonally. Now, these are precisely the questions with which the Bhagavad Gītā is concerned. The answers attempted vary greatly, not only in different Upanishads, but often in adjoining parts of the same Upanishad. This also is true of the Gītā, and is eminently characteristic of the literature to which it and the Upanishads belong. We often hear of a "system" of the Upanishads. In my opinion there is no such thing. Nor is there a "system" of thought in the Bhagavad Gītā, in the sense of a unitary, logically coherent, and exclusive structure of philosophic thought. He who looks for such a thing in any work of this period will be disappointed. Or, worse yet, he may be tempted to apply Procrustean methods, and by excisions or strained interpretations to force into a unified mold the thoughts of a writer who never dreamed of the necessity or desirability of such unity. The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gītā contain starts toward various *systems;* but none of them contains a single *system,* except possibly in the sense that one idea may be made more prominent than its rivals in an individual work or part of a work. Still less can we speak of a single system as taught by the Upanishads as a whole.

The very concept of a philosophic "system" did not exist in India in the time of the early Upanishads and the Gītā. In later times the Hindus produced various systems of philosophy, which are quite comparable with what we are accustomed to understand by that term. These systems all grew, at least in large measure, out of the older ideas found in the Upanishads. Each of the later thinkers chose out of the richness of Upanishadic thought such elements as pleased him, and constructed his logically coherent system on that basis. Thus, the Upanishads, broadly speaking, are the prime source of all the rival philosophies of later India. But they themselves are more modest. They do not claim to have succeeded in bringing under one rubric the absolute and complete truth about man and the universe. If they seem at times to make such claims, these statements are to be understood as tentative, not final; and often they are contradicted by an adjoining passage in which a very different view-point finds expression. This may seem to us naive. But I think it would be truer, as well as more charitable, to regard it as a sign of intellectual modesty, combined with an honest and burning eagerness for truth. Again and again an Upanishadic thinker arrives at an intellectual *aperçu* so lofty, so noble, that we might well forgive him for resting content with it. Instead, he abandons it, as it seems without hesitation and without regret, and straight-

way tries another approach to the same eternal problems. Some ideas recur more frequently than others; but no formula ever gives entire and permanent satisfaction to these restless thinkers. Is this to their discredit?

Thus there grew up in Upanishadic circles not one but a group of attempts to solve the "riddles of the universe." The Bhagavad Gītā, we have seen, belongs to these circles intellectually, and many, if not most, of its ideas are derived from the older Upanishads. More important than this is the fact that it shares with them the trait of intellectual fluidity or tentativeness to which I have just referred. Unlike most of the later Hindu philosophic works, which also derive from the Upanishads but which select and systematize their materials, the Gītā is content to present various rival formulas, admitting at least a provisional validity to them all. To be sure, it has its favorites. But we can usually find in its own text expressions which, in strict logic, contradict its most cardinal doctrines. From the non-logical, mystical view-point of the Gītā this is no particular disadvantage. Rationalistic logic simply does not apply to its problems.

In one other respect there is an important difference of fundamental attitude between the Bhagavad Gītā and most western philosophic thought. All Hindu philosophy has a practical aim. It seeks the truth, but not the truth for its own sake. It is truth as a means of human salvation that is its object. In other words, all Hindu philosophy is religious in basis. To the Hindu mind, "the truth shall make you free." Otherwise there is no virtue in it. This is quite as true of the later systems as of the early and less systematic speculations. To all of them knowledge is a means to an end. This attitude has its roots in a still more primitive conception, which appears clearly in the beginnings of Vedic philosophy and is still very much alive in the early Upanishads: the conception of the magic power of knowledge. To the early Hindus, as to mankind in early stages of development the world over, "knowledge is power" in a very direct sense. Whatever you know you control, directly, and by virtue of your knowledge. The primitive magician gets his neighbors, animal, human, or supernatural, into his power, by acquiring knowledge of them. So the early Vedic thinkers sought to control the most fundamental and universal powers by *knowing* them. This idea most Hindus of classical times never quite outgrew. The Sanskrit word *vidyā*, "knowledge," means also "magic." Let westerners not be scornful of this. Down to quite modern times the

same idea prevailed in Europe. In Robert Greene's play, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay,* produced in England at the end of the sixteenth century, we find it in full force. Roger Bacon, the greatest of medieval English scholars, is there represented simply as a mighty magician, and a contest of scholarship between him and a rival German scholar resolves itself into a mere test of their powers in necromancy. In short, knowledge meant primarily magic power. No doubt Roger Bacon himself knew better. But he was an exceptional man, intellectually far in advance of his time. The more advanced Hindu thinkers, also, kept their speculations free from magic, at least in its cruder forms. Even such a comparatively early work as the Bhagavad Gītā has no traces of the magical use of knowledge for the attainment of trivial, worldly ends, though many such traces are still found in the Upanishads, its immediate predecessors. To this extent it marks an advance over them, and stands on essentially the same footing with the best of the later systematic philosophies. But the Bhagavad Gītā and the later systems agree with the early Upanishadic thinkers in their practical attitude towards speculation. They all seek the truth, not because of its abstract interest, but because in some sense or other they think that a realization of the truth about man's place in the universe and his destiny will solve all man's problems; free him from all the troubles of life; in short, bring him to the *summum bonum,* whatever they conceive that to be. Just as different thinkers differ as to what that truth is, so they also differ in their definitions of salvation or of the *summum bonum,* and of the best practical means of attaining it. Indeed, as we have seen, the early thinkers, including the author of the Gītā, frequently differ with themselves on such points. But they all agree in this fundamental attitude towards the objects of speculation. They are primarily religious rather than philosophical. And the historic origin of their attitude, in primitive ideas about the magic power of knowledge, has left a trace which I think was never fully effaced, although it was undoubtedly transcended and transfigured.

CHAPTER II

The Origins of Hindu Speculation

THE records of Hindu religious thought, as of Hindu literature in general, begin with the Rig Veda. This is a collection consisting mostly of hymns of praise and prayer to a group of deities who are primarily personified powers of nature—sun, fire, wind, sky, and the like—with the addition of some gods whose original nature is obscure. The religion represented by the Rig Veda, however, is by no means a simple or primitive nature-worship. Before the dawn of history it had developed into a ritualistic cult, a complicated system of sacrifices, the performance of which was the class privilege of a guild of priests. In the hands of this priestly class the sacrificial cult became more and more elaborate, and occupied more and more the center of the stage. At first merely a means of gratification and propitiation of the gods, the sacrifice gradually became an end in itself, and finally, in the period succeeding the hymns of the Rig Veda, the gods became supernumeraries. The now all-important sacrifices no longer persuaded, but compelled them to do what the sacrificer desired; or else, at times, the sacrifice produced the desired result immediately, without any participation whatsoever on the part of the gods. The gods are even spoken of themselves as offering sacrifices; and it is said that they owe their divine position, or their very existence, to the sacrifice. This extreme glorification of the ritual performance appears in the period of the Brāhmanas, theological text-books whose purpose is to expound the mystic meaning of the various rites. They are later in date than the Rig-Vedic hymns; and their religion, a pure and quasi-magical ritualism, is the apotheosis, or the *reductio ad absurdum*, of the ritualistic nature-worship of the hymns.

Even in Rig-Vedic times the priestly ritual was so elaborate, and so expensive, that in the nature of things only rich men, mainly princes, could engage in it. It was therefore not only a hieratic but an aristocratic cult. The real religion of the great mass of the people was different. We find it portrayed best in the Atharva Veda. This is a collection of hymns, or rather magic charms, in-

tended to accompany a vast mass of simpler rites and ceremonies which were not connected with the hieratic cult of the Rig Veda. Almost every conceivable human need and aspiration is represented by these popular performances. Their religious basis may be described as primitive animism, and their method of operation as simple magic. That is, they conceive all creatures, things, powers, and even abstract principles, as animated by "spirits," which they seek to control by incantations and magic rites. They know also the higher gods of the Rig-Vedic pantheon, and likewise other gods which perhaps belonged at the start to aboriginal, non-"Aryan" tribes ("Aryan" is the name which the Vedic Hindus apply to themselves). But they invoke these gods after the manner of magic-mongers, much as medieval European incantations invoke the persons of the Trinity and Christian saints in connection with magic practices to heal a broken bone or to bring rain for the crops.

Later Hindu thought developed primarily out of the hieratic, Rig-Vedic religion; but it contains also quite a dash of lower, more popular beliefs. The separation of the two elements is by no means always easy. The truth seems to be that the speculations out of which the later forms of thought developed were carried on mainly by priests, adherents of the hieratic ritual religion. Almost all the intellectual leaders of the community belonged to the priestly class. But they were naturally—almost inevitably—influenced more or less by the popular religion which surrounded them. Indeed, there was no opposition between the two types of religion, nor such a sharp cleavage as our description may suggest. The followers of the hieratic cult also engaged in many practices that belonged to the more popular religion. This accounts for the constant infiltration of ideas from the "lower" sphere into the "higher," which we see going on at all periods. At times it is hard to decide whether a given new development is due to the intrusion of popular ideas, or to internal evolution within the sphere of the priestly religion itself.

For we can clearly see the growth of certain new ideas within the Rig Veda itself. Out of the older ritualistic nature-worship, with its indefinite plurality of gods, arises in many Rig-Vedic hymns a new attitude, a sort of mitigated polytheism, to which has been given the name of *henotheism.* By this is meant a religious point of view which, when dealing for the moment with any particular god, seems to feel it as an insult to his dignity to admit the competition of other deities. And so, either the particular god of the moment is made to absorb all the others, who are declared to be

manifestations of him; or else, he is given attributes which in strict logic could only be given to a sole monotheistic deity. Thus various Vedic gods are each at different times declared to be the creator, preserver, and animator of the universe, the sole ruler of all creatures, human and divine, and so on. Such hymns, considered separately, seem clearly to imply monotheism; but all that they really imply is a ritualistic henotheism. As each god comes upon the stage in the procession of rites, he is impartially granted this increasingly extravagant praise, until everything that could be said of all the gods collectively is said of each of them in turn, individually. We see that Vedic henotheism is rooted in the hieratic ritual, without which so strange a religious attitude could hardly have developed.

Indeed, it was not long before some advanced thinkers saw that such things as the creation of the world and the rulership over it could really be predicated only of one Personality. The question then arose, how to name and define that One? We might have expected that some one of the old gods would be erected into a truly monotheistic deity. But, perhaps because none of them seemed sufficiently superior to his fellows, perhaps for some other reason, this was not done. Instead, in a few late hymns of the Rig Veda we find various tentative efforts to establish a new deity in this supreme position. Different names are given to him: "the Lord of Creatures" (Prajāpati), "the All-maker" (Vishvakarman), and the like. As these names show, the new concept is rather abstract, and no longer ritualistic. Yet it is still personal. It is a *God* who creates, supports, and rules the world; a kind of Yahweh or Allah; not an impersonal First Cause. It is an attempt at monotheism, not yet monism.

These starts toward monotheism remained abortive, in the sense that they did not, at least directly, result in the establishment of a monotheistic religion comparable to that of the Hebrew people. Many centuries were to pass before such religions gained any strong foothold in India; and the connection between them and these early suggestions is very remote and tenuous. The later religions owe their strength largely to other elements of more popular origin. Yet sporadic and more or less tentative suggestions of the sort continued to be made.

More striking, and more significant for the later development of Hindu philosophy, is a movement towards *monism* which appears, along with the monotheistic movement, even in the Rig Veda itself, though only tentatively and very rarely. One or two Rig-Vedic hymns attempt to formulate the One in strictly impersonal, non-

theistic terms. Among these I must mention the one hundred and twenty-ninth hymn of the tenth book of the Rig Veda, which to my mind is a very remarkable production, considering its time and place. This "hymn" (for so we can hardly help calling it, since it is found in the "hymn-book" of the Rig Veda) also seeks to explain the universe as evolving out of One; but its One is no longer a god. It knows no Yahweh or Allah, any more than the ritualistic Indra or Varuna. It definitely brushes aside all gods, not indeed denying their existence, but declaring that they are all of late and secondary origin; they know nothing of the beginnings of things. The First Principle of this hymn is "That One" (*tad ekam*). It is of neuter gender, as it were lest some theologian should get hold of it and insist on falling down and worshiping it. It is not only impersonal and non-theistic, but absolutely uncharacterizable and indescribable, without qualities or attributes, even negative ones. It was "neither existent nor non-existent." To seek to know it is hopeless; in the last two verses of the hymn (there are only seven in all) the author relapses into a philosophic scepticism which remains characteristic of Hindu higher thought in certain moods. While the later Upanishads often try to describe the One all-inclusively, by saying that it is *everything*, that it contains all possible and conceivable characteristics; still in their deepest moments they too prefer the negative statement *neti, neti*[4]—"it is not (this), it is not (that)." To apply to it any description is to limit and bound that which is limitless and boundless. It cannot be conceived; it cannot be known.

But the ancient Hindu thinkers could never resign themselves to this scepticism. Even if cold reason showed them at times that they could not, in the nature of things, know the Unknowable, still their restless speculation kept returning to the struggle again and again, from ever varied points of attack. In the Rig Veda itself, in one of its latest hymns (10.90), appears the first trace of a strain of monistic thought which is of the greatest importance for later Hindu philosophy: the universe is conceived as parallel in nature to the human personality. The First Principle in this hymn is called Purusha, that is, "Man" or "Person." From the several parts of this cosmic Person are derived, by a still rather crude process of evolution, all existing things. The significance of this lies in its anticipation of the Upanishadic idea of the identity of the human soul (later called *ātman*, literally "self," as a rule) with the universal principle.

[4] Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad 3.9.26, and in other places.

Other, later Vedic texts, especially the Atharva Veda, also contain speculative materials. They are extremely varied in character; they testify to the restlessness and tentativeness which we have seen as a characteristic of all early Hindu thought. At times they seem monotheistic in tendency. The "Lord of Creatures," Prajāpati, of the Rig Veda, appears again and again, as a kind of demiurge; and other names are invented for the same or a similar figure, such as the "Establisher," Dhātar, or the "Arranger," Vidhātar, or "He that is in the Highest," Parameshthin. But never does such a figure attain anything like the definite dignity which we associate with a genuine monotheistic deity. And more often the thought centers around less personal, more abstract entities, either physical or metaphysical, or more or less both at once. The sun, especially under the mystic name of Rohita, "the Ruddy One," enjoys a momentary glory in several Atharva-Vedic charms, which invest him with the functions of a cosmic principle. Or the world is developed out of water; we are reminded of Thales, the first of the Greek philosophers. The wind, conceived as the most subtle of physical elements and as the "life-breath" (*prāna*) of the universe, plays at times a like role, and by being compared with man's life-breath it contributes to the development of the cosmic "Person" (Purusha) of the Rig Veda into the later Atman or Soul (of man) as the Supreme One. The word *ātman* itself seems actually to be used in this way in one or two late verses of the Atharva Veda.[5] The power of Time (*kāla*), or of Desire (*kāma*)—a sort of cosmic Will, reminding us of Schopenhauer—is elsewhere conceived as the force behind the evolution of the universe. Or, still more abstractly, the world-all is derived from a hardly defined "Support," that is, a "Fundamental Principle" (*skambha*), on which everything rests. These and other shadowy figures flit across the stage of later Vedic speculation. Individually, few of them have enough definiteness or importance to merit much attention. But in the mass they are of the greatest value for one who would follow the development of Hindu thought as a whole.

Especially important is the eminently *practical* spirit which animates all this speculation. As we saw in the first chapter, metaphysical truth *per se* and for its own sake is not its object. Earnest and often profound though these thinkers are, they never lose sight for long of their practical aim, which is to control, by virtue of their superior knowledge, the cosmic forces which they study. That, I think, is why so many of their speculations are imbedded in the

[5] 10.8.43, 44.

Atharva Veda, a book of magic spells, which to our minds would seem the most inappropriate place possible.

It might seem to follow from this that the speculative activity of this period belonged to the popular sphere represented by the religion of the Atharva Veda, more than to the ritualistic cult that was the heir of the Rig Veda. But I think there is evidence to the contrary. However appropriate to the spirit of the popular religion it seemed in some respects, this activity was carried on mainly by the priests of the hieratic ritual. And this fact, which for various reasons seems to me indubitable, finds a striking concrete expression in a philosophic concept produced in this period which deserves special consideration.

Among all the varied formulations of the First and Supreme Principle, none recurs more constantly throughout the later Vedic texts than the *brahman.* The oldest meaning of this word seems to be "sacred utterance," or concretely "hymn" or "incantation." It is applied both to the ritual hymns of the Rig Veda and to the magic charms of the Atharva Veda. Any holy, mystic utterance is *brahman.* This is the regular, if not the exclusive, meaning which the word has in the Rig Veda. But from the point of view of those times, this definition implies far more than it would suggest to our minds. The spoken word had a mysterious, supernatural power; it contained within itself the essence of the thing expressed. To "know the *name*" of anything was to control the thing. The *word* means wisdom, knowledge; and knowledge, as we have seen, was (magic) power. So *brahman,* the "holy word," soon came to mean the mystic power inherent in the holy word.

But to the later Vedic ritualists, this holy word was the direct expression and embodiment of the ritual religion, and as such a cosmic power of the first magnitude. The ritual religion, and hence its verbal expression, the *brahman,* was omnipotent. All human desires and aspirations were accessible to him who mastered it. All other cosmic forces, even the greatest of natural and supernatural powers, were dependent upon it. The gods themselves, originally the beneficiaries of the cult, became its helpless mechanical agents, or were left out of account altogether as useless middlemen. The cult was the direct controlling force of the universe. And the *brahman* was the spirit, the expression, of the cult; nay, it *was* the cult, mystically speaking, because the word and the thing were one; he who knew the word, knew and controlled the thing. Therefore, he who knew the *brahman* knew and controlled the whole universe.

It is no wonder, then, that in the later Vedic texts (not yet in the Rig Veda) we find the *brahman* frequently mentioned as the primal principle[6] and as the ruling and guiding spirit of the universe. It is a thoroughly ritualistic concept, inconceivable except as an outgrowth of the theories of the ritualistic cult, but very simple and as it were self-evident from the point of view of the ritualists. The overwhelming prominence and importance of the *brahman* in later Vedic speculation seems, therefore, a striking proof of the fact that this speculation was at least in large part a product of ritualistic, priestly circles. If it shows a magic tinge suggestive of the popular rites and incantations, this simply means that the priests were also men, children of their times, and imbued with the ideas which prevailed among their people.

Not content with attempts to identify the One, the Vedic thinkers also try to define His, or Its, relation to the empiric world. Here again their suggestions are many and varied. Often the One is a sort of demiurge, a Creator, Father, First Cause. Such theistic expressions may be used of impersonal monistic names for the One as well as of more personal, quasi-monotheistic ones. The One is compared to a carpenter or a smith; he joins or smelts the world into being. Or his act is like an act of generation; he begets all beings. Still more interestingly, his creative activity is compared to a sacrifice, a ritual performance, or to prayer, or religious fervor (*dhī, tapas*). This obviously ritualistic imagery appears even in the Rig Veda itself, in several of its philosophic hymns. In the Purusha hymn, already referred to, the universe is derived from the sacrifice of the cosmic Person, the Purusha; the figure is of the dismemberment of a sacrificial animal; from each of the members of the cosmic Purusha evolved a part of the existing world. The performers of this cosmogonic sacrifice are "the gods,"—inconsistently, of course, for the gods have already been declared to be secondary to the Purusha, who transcends all existing things. In later Vedic times we repeatedly meet with expressions suggesting such ritualistic lines of thought. They confirm our feeling that we are moving in hieratic circles.

We see from what has just been said of the Purusha hymn that the One—here the Purusha, the cosmic "Person" or "Man"—may be thought of as the material source (*causa materialis*) as well as the creator (*causa efficiens*) of the world. All evolves out of it, or

[6] "There is nothing more ancient or higher than this *brahman*," Shatapatha Brāhmana, 10.3.5.11.

is a part of it; but frequently, as in the Purusha hymn, it is *more* than all empiric existence; it transcends all things, which form, or derive from, but a part of it. Again, it is often spoken of as the ruler, controller, or lord of all. Or, it is the foundation, fundament, upon which all is based, which supports all. Still more significant are passages which speak of the One as subtly pervading all, as air or ether or space (*ākāsha*) pervades the physical universe, and animating all, as the breath of life (*prāna*) is thought of as both pervading and animating the human body.

Such ideas as the last mentioned lead to a deepening and spiritualizing of the concept of a parallelism between man, the microcosm, and the universe, the macrocosm, which as we have seen dates from late Rig-Vedic times. In the Purusha hymn of the Rig Veda we find a crude evolution of various parts of the physical universe from the parts of the physical body of the cosmic "Man." But in the later Vedic texts the feeling grows that man's nature is not accounted for by dissecting his physical body—and, correspondingly, that there must be something more in the universe than the sum total of its physical elements. What is that "something more" in man? Is it the "life-breath" or "life-breaths" (*prāna*), which seem to be in and through various parts of the human body and to be the principle of man's life (since they leave the body at death)? So many Vedic thinkers believed. What, then, is the corresponding "life-breath" of the universe? Obviously the wind, say some. Others think of it as the *ākāsha,* "ether," or "space." But even these are too physical, too material. On the human side, too, it begins to be evident that the "life-breath," like its cosmic counterpart the wind, is in reality physical. Surely the essential Man must be something else. What then? Flittingly, here and there, it is suggested that it may be man's "desire" or "will" (*kāma*), or his "mind" (*manas*), or something else of a more or less psychological nature. But already in the Atharva Veda, and with increasing frequency later, we find as an expression for the real, essential part of Man the word *ātman* used. *Atman* means simply "self"; it is used familiarly as a reflexive pronoun, like the German *sich.* One could hardly get a more abstract term for that which is left when everything unessential is deducted from man, and which is at the same time the principle of his life, the living soul that pervades his being. And, carrying on the parallelism, we presently find mention of the *ātman,* self or soul, of the universe. The texts do not content themselves with that; they continue to speculate as to what that "soul" of the universe is. But these specula-

tions tend to become more and more free from purely physical elements. Increasing partiality is shown for such metaphysical expressions as "the existent," or "that which is" (*sat*),[7] or again "the non-existent" (*asat*); in the Rig-Vedic hymn 10.129 we were told that in the beginning there was "neither existent nor non-existent," but later we find both "the existent" and "the non-existent" used as expressions for the first principle. But perhaps the favorite formula in later Vedic times for the soul of the universe is the originally ritualistic one of the *brahman*.

This parallelism between the "self" of man and the "self" of the universe is still only a parallelism, not yet an identity. But we are now on the eve of the last and the boldest step, which it remained for the thinkers of the early Upanishads to take: that of declaring that the soul of man *is* the soul of the universe.

[7] Compare the Greek τὸ ὄν or τὸ ὄντως ὄν, "that which (really) is," and, for a less exact parallel, the Kantian *Ding an sich*.

CHAPTER III

The Upanishads, and the Fundamental Doctrines of Later Hindu Thought

THE Upanishads are the earliest Hindu treatises, other than single hymns or brief passages, which deal with philosophic subjects. They are formally parts of the Veda,[8]—the last offshoots of Vedic literature. The dry bones of the Vedic ritual cult rattle about in them in quite a noisy fashion at times, and seriously strain our patience and our charity. But they also contain the apotheosis, the New Testament, of Vedic philosophy. In them the struggling speculations which we have briefly sketched in the last chapter reach their highest development. They do not, be it noted, receive any final, systematic codification. That came much later. They are still tentative, fluid, and, one may fairly say, unstable; they are frequently inconsistent with each other and with themselves. They contain no system, but starts toward various different systems. Later Hindu thought utilized these starts and developed them into the various systematic philosophies of later times—Sānkhya, Vedānta, and the rest. In fact, there are few important ideas of later Hindu philosophical or religious thought which are not at least foreshadowed in the Upanishads. They are the connecting link between the Veda and later Hinduism; the last word of the one, the prime source of the other.

In this chapter, I wish to deal with the Upanishads mostly from the latter point of view: to show how they reveal the early stages of the fundamental postulates of later Hindu thought. While the views reproduced in this chapter are all found in the early Upanishads (except where the contrary is stated), we also find in them

[8] At least the older and more genuine ones are that; we may ignore for our present purpose the numerous late and secondary works which call themselves Upanishads.

expressions of quite different views, which approach much more closely the older Vedic speculations. The relation of the Upanishads to those earlier speculations may, in general, be described by saying that while the Upanishads carry their inquiries along essentially the same lines, and are actuated by the same underlying idea of the mystic, magic power of knowledge, their thoughts become increasingly anthropocentric and less cosmo-physical or ritualistic. Explanations of the cosmic absolute in purely physical terms, and speculations about the esoteric meaning of ritual entities, while they still occur, are less prominent; speculations on the nature and fate of man, and explanations of the universe in human or quasi-human terms, increase in frequency. Thus one of the most striking ideas in the Upanishads is that the human soul or self *is* the Absolute ("that art thou";[9] "I am Brahman";[10] "it [the universal Brahman] is thy self, that is within everything";[11] "that which rests in all things and is distinct from all things, which all things know not, of which all things are the body [that is, the material representation or form], which controls all things within, that is thy self [*ātman*], the immortal Inner Controller"[12]). All that is outside of this Self is at times conceived as created by, or emitted from, It (as in dreams the Self seems to create a dream-world and to live in it).[13] At other times the sharp line drawn between the Self and material nature, that is all that is not Self, is made to preclude any genetic relation between the two.[14]

In any case, the attention of the Upanishadic thinkers is more and more centered upon the human soul. Other things are important as they are related to it. And—while its origin and past history remain objects of interest—we find an increasing amount of attention paid to its future fate. The practical purpose of speculation reasserts itself emphatically in the question, how can man control

[9] Chāndogya Upanishad 6.8.7, etc.
[10] Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10, etc.
[11] *Ibid.*, 3.4.1.
[12] *Ibid.*, 3.7.15.
[13] *Ibid.*, 4.3.10. According to several Upanishad passages the soul performs this creative act by a sort of mystic, quasi-magic power, sometimes called *māyā*, that is, "artifice"; it is a word sometimes applied to sorcery, and to tricks and strategems of various kinds. The Bhagavad Gītā similarly speaks of the Deity as appearing in material nature by His *māyā*, His mystic power. This does not mean (in my opinion; some scholars take the contrary view) that the world outside of the self is illusory, without real existence, as the later Vedānta philosophy maintains; *māyā*, I think, is not used in the Vedāntic sense of "world-illusion" until many centuries later.
[14] Thus foreshadowing the later dualistic systems, such as Sānkhya and Yoga, which recognize matter and soul as two eternal and eternally independent principles—a doctrine which is familiarly accepted in the Bhagavad Gītā.

his own destiny? What is man's *summum bonum*, and how shall he attain it? It is out of such questions and the answers to them that the basic postulates of later Hindu thought develop.

In early Vedic times the objects of human desire are the ordinary ones which natural man seeks the world over: wealth, pleasures, power over his fellows, long life, and offspring; and finally, since death puts an end to the enjoyment of all these, immortality. Immortality, however, can only be hoped for in a future existence, since all life on this earth is seen to end in death. So the Vedic poets hope for some sort of heavenly and eternal life after death. But presently they begin to be uneasy lest perchance death might interfere with that future life, also. The fear of this "re-death" becomes, in what we may call the Middle Vedic period (the Brāhmanas), a very prominent feature. Combined with this is the growing belief in the imperishability of the *ātman*, the Self or Soul, the essential part of the living being. These two ideas are not mutually contradictory. Death remains, as a very disagreeable experience—no less disagreeable if it must be undergone more than once—even though it does not destroy the Soul but only brings it over into a new existence. What pleasure can man take in wealth, power, and offspring, if this sword of Damocles is constantly hanging over him, threatening to deprive him of all, and to launch him upon some new and untried existence? Moreover, that future existence may be no better than the present one. Possibly under the influence of popular animism, which sees "souls" similar to the human soul in all parts of nature, the future life is brought down from heaven to this earth. And so, in the early Upanishads, we find quite definite statements of the theory of rebirth or transmigration, which was to remain through all future time an axiom to practically all Hindus. According to this, the Soul is subject to an indefinite series of existences, in various material forms or "bodies," either in this world or in various imaginary worlds. The Bhagavad Gītā expresses this universal Hindu belief in the form of two similes. It says that one existence follows another just as different stages of life—childhood, young manhood, maturity, and old age—follow one another in this life.[15] Or again, just as one lays off old garments and dons new ones, so the Soul lays off an old, worn-out body and puts on a new one.[16] One of the oldest Upanishads uses the simile of a caterpillar, which crawls to the end of a blade of grass and then "gathers itself to-

[15] 2.13.
[16] 2.22.

gether" to pass over to another blade of grass; so the Soul at death "gathers itself together" and passes over to a new existence.[17]

The Upanishads also begin to combine with this doctrine of an indefinite series of reincarnations the old belief in retribution for good and evil deeds in a life after death; a belief which prevailed among the people of Vedic India, as all over the world. With the transference of the future life from a mythical other world to this earth, and with the extension or multiplication of it to an indefinite series of future lives more or less like the present life, the way was prepared for the characteristically Hindu doctrine of "karma" (*karman*) or "deed." This doctrine, which is also axiomatic to the Hindus, teaches that the state of each existence of each individual is absolutely conditioned and determined by that individual's morality in previous existences. A man is exactly what he has made himself and what he therefore deserves to be. An early Upanishad says: "Just as (the Soul) is (in this life) of this or that sort; just as it acts, just as it operates, even so precisely it becomes (in the next life). If it acts well it becomes good; if it acts ill it becomes evil. As a result of right action it becomes what is good; as a result of evil action it becomes what is evil."[18] In short, the law of the conservation of energy is rigidly applied to the moral world. Every action, whether good or bad, must have its result for the doer. If in the present life a man is on the whole good, his next existence is better by just so much as his good deeds have outweighed his evil deeds. He becomes a great and noble man, or a king, or perhaps a god (the gods, like men, are subject to the law of transmigration). Conversely, a wicked man is reborn as a person of low position, or as an animal, or, in cases of exceptional depravity, he may fall to existence in hell. And all this is not carried out by decree of some omnipotent and sternly just Power. It is a natural law. It operates of itself just as much as the law of gravitation. It is therefore wholly dispassionate, neither merciful nor vindictive. It is absolutely inescapable; but at the same time it never cuts off hope. A man is what he has made himself; but by that same token he may make himself what he will. The soul tormented in the lowest hell may raise himself in time to the highest heaven, simply by doing right. Perfect justice is made the basic law of the universe. It seems hardly possible to conceive a principle of greater moral grandeur and perfection.

[17] Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.3.
[18] *Ibid.*, 4.4.5.

The Upanishads go farther than this in anticipating later Hindu views of the Soul's progress. One of the earliest of them contains this passage: "This Spirit of Man consists simply of *desire.* As is his desire, so is his resolve; as is his resolve, so is the deed (*karman*) that he does; as is the deed that he does, so is that (fate) which he attains unto."[19] The root of action, and so the determining cause of man's future fate, is his "desire." It follows that if man's desires can be properly regulated, he can be led to his true goal. This remains a fundamental tenet of later Hinduism.

It might seem that the glorification of the Soul as the center of the universe should be a comforting and inspiring thought. And, indeed, the Upanishads and later Hindu works describe the perfections of the Soul in inspiring and even ecstatic terms. But the practical effect of all this upon the Hindu attitude towards our present life was just the opposite. It only served to emphasize the contrast between the Soul and all that is not Soul, that is, all material or empiric existence. "Whatever is other than That (the Soul) is evil," says an early Upanishad.[20] Soon this crystallizes into a definitely and thoroughly pessimistic view of life. All existence, in the ordinary empiric sense, is inherently worthless and base and evil. Pleasures are both transitory and illusory. Death is not only an evil in itself, which threatens us at every moment, but also it leads only to further existence, that is, to further misery. True joy and peace can only be found in the Self.

Accordingly, the perfected man is he *"whose desire is the Soul,* whose desire is satisfied, who has no desire" (other than the Soul; that is, who is free from ordinary, worldly desires),[21] who "is beyond desire, has dispensed with evil, knows no fear, is free from sorrow."[22] As long as a man is affected by desire (other than the desire for the Soul's perfection, which, as just indicated, is the same as having *no* desire), this leads him to "resolve" and to "action," which must have its fruit in continued material existence; and all material existence is evil.

The estate of this perfected man is most commonly described as attainment of, going to, or union with the One—which may be called Brahman, or the Atman (the Self or Soul), or some synonym. It

[19] *Ibid.,* 4.4.5.
[20] *Ibid.,* 3.4.2.
[21] Which are defined by the Buddhists as including (1) desire for sensual pleasures, (2) desire for continued existence (in other incarnations), and (3) desire for prosperity in this existence. This classification may be regarded as typical for Hindu systems in general.
[22] Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.6; 4.3.22.

is not non-existence, according to the Upanishads; for the soul is immortal, and cannot cease to be. It is sometimes even declared to be a conscious state; but this is immediately qualified by saying that though the soul still has the faculties of seeing, knowing, and so on, there is no object for these faculties to act upon, so that after all it is to all intents and purposes a state of unconsciousness.[23] As the soul is one with the universal subject, than which there is then no other, there can be no object, and hence no activity of the senses or mental faculties. So at other times the texts plainly say "there is no consciousness after death (for the perfected soul)."[24] They conceive it as similar to the state of deep and dreamless sleep, which is indeed at times thought of as a temporary union with the One, and so a foretaste of that perfected condition.[25] It is natural that such a state should be associated with bliss; for while the waking man has no recollection of consciousness or anything else as having existed in sound sleep, still he awakes from it feeling refreshed and often with a vague impression of having been in some sort of remote and happy state. At any rate, the Upanishads leave no doubt that there is in this union with the One a total cessation of desires, of evil, of sorrow—in short, of ordinary, empiric, worldly existence, which is characterized by desires, evil, and sorrow. But not content with that, they describe it as a state of pure and ecstatic bliss, infinitely surpassing all human joys, indeed far exceeding the power of mind to conceive it.[26]

Later Hindu religions and philosophies call this state by the well-known name of *nirvāna*. The word does not occur in the early Upanishads; but the idea is there. *Nirvāna* means "extinction," originally of a fire or flame; then of the flames of desire, as the cause of continued rebirth. To some later sects, such as the Buddhists, it means also literal extinction of life, of existence in any form; for Buddhism, in its original form, denies the existence of either world-soul or individual soul. Yet even in Buddhist texts *nirvāna* is described as a state of blissful ecstasy; so firmly established was this mode of thought. It also makes no difference if, with the later Sānkhya, one denies the world-soul and merely conceives the perfected individual souls as existing separately, independent of each other and of matter; still the same descriptions are used. All the later variations in metaphysical theory (some of them found already in the Upanishads) make no difference in the concept of the per-

[23] *Ibid.*, 4.5.15; 4.3.23ff.
[24] *Ibid.*, 4.5.13.
[25] *Ibid.*, 4.3.19ff.
[26] *Ibid.*, 4.3.32, 33.

fected state as a kind of pure and—so to speak—unconscious consciousness, and transcendent bliss. The Bhagavad Gītā uses the word *nirvāna* several times, generally in the compound *brahmanirvāna*, "extinction in Brahman," or "the extinction which is Brahman." More commonly it uses vaguer terms to describe the goal which means salvation—such expressions as "perfection," "the highest goal," "the supreme state," or "My (God's) estate." Or it simply says "he attains Me (God)," or "he attains Brahman"; that is, the perfected man becomes united with God or with Brahman. Details as to the nature of that state are wholly wanting in the Gītā, if we except such vague expressions as "that highest state of Mine, to which having gone one does not return, is not illumined by sun or moon or fire"[27]—implying that it shines by its own light. We get no idea of how the Gītā conceived the state of a man who had gained this position. All that seems clear is that it was conceived as some sort of real existence, not as total and absolute annihilation.

The way to attain this state of perfection, as to attain anything else, is, according to the usual Upanishad doctrine, by true knowledge. Knowledge is the magic talisman that opens all doors. He who knows anything, controls it; and so, he who knows the supreme truth, thereby becomes master of it, and gains the highest state. "He who knows that supreme Brahman, unto Brahman he goes."[28] Similar expressions appear constantly throughout the whole Upanishad literature. This comes as near as anything to being a universal doctrine of the Upanishads. It is furthermore a doctrine which is of fundamental importance in all later Hindu thought. All the later systems make it their prime business to point the way to human salvation; and one may say in general that their methods are primarily and originally intellectual, or, perhaps better, intuitive. They teach that man shall be saved through the realization of the supreme truth. In their formulations of that truth they differ, of course, among themselves; that is the reason for the plurality of systems. But they usually state, or at least imply, the omnipotence of knowledge; and conversely they usually emphasize the fact that ignorance (*avidyā*) is the root of evil. Characteristic of them all is the Buddhist formula, which says that ignorance is the cause of desire; desire leads to action; and action must have its fruit, as we have seen, in continued existence, all of which is evil.

[27] 15.6.
[28] Mundaka Upanishad, 3.2.9; Kaushītaki Upanishad, 1.4.

Even *good* deeds are still deeds, and must have their fruit, according to the doctrine of "karma." And to attain the *summum bonum* man must get rid of all deeds, of all karma. Therefore, while most if not all Hindu systems teach a practical morality, they also teach that no degree of morality, however perfect, can lead to final salvation. In this, too, they are anticipated by the Upanishads. The perfect soul is "beyond good and evil." [29] Neither good nor evil can affect him. At times the Upanishads seem even to say or imply that when a man has attained enlightenment, he can do what he likes without fear of results. This somewhat dangerous doctrine is, however, not typical, and is probably to be regarded only as a strained and exaggerated expression of the idea that the truly enlightened soul cannot, in the very nature of things, do an evil deed. If he could, he would not be truly enlightened; for "he who has not ceased from evil conduct cannot attain Him (the Atman) by intelligence." [30] This is similar to the Socratic notion that the truly wise man must inevitably be virtuous. The difference is that the Upanishads regard even virtue, as well as vice, as transcended by perfect knowledge; the possessor thereof passes beyond both, and rises to a plane on which moral concepts simply have no meaning. Morality applies only in the world of karma, the world of ordinary empiric existence, which the enlightened man has left behind him. In the final state of the perfected man, as we have seen, there can be, strictly speaking, no action; so how can there be either moral or immoral action? The attitude of the Upanishads, and following them of most later Hindu systems, is then that morality has only a negative importance, and in the last analysis none whatever, in man's struggle for salvation. Immorality is a sign of imperfection; it can only be due to the prevalence in the soul of ignorance, causing desire, leading to action and rebirth. It must be got rid of. But it will fall away of itself with the attainment of true wisdom. And no amount of good deeds will bring that wisdom which alone can lead to release. Good deeds result in less unhappy existences, but that is all; salvation is release from all empiric existence. This does not prevent the teaching of a system of practical ethics, for the guidance of those who have not yet attained enlightenment. In actual practice, most Hindu sects inculcate very lofty moral principles; and many of them devote much attention thereto. But theoretically, at least, such things do not concern their fundamental aims.

[29] Kaushītaki Upanishad, 1.4; compare Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 4.3.22, etc.

[30] Katha Upanishad, 2.24.

Yet at times morality is spoken of as if it had a positive, if only qualified, value in preparing the soul for the reception of enlightenment. The fact is that the strictly intellectual or intuitional position is hard for the ordinary man to master. He needs the encouragement of more concrete aims, or helps toward the final aim. Many of the later sects recognize this, either implicitly or explicitly, and so do not hold strictly to the position that "knowledge," that is, immediate perception of the metaphysical truth, is the sole and exclusive means of salvation. Even the Upanishads do not quite do this, though they come closer to it than many later systems. Despite the popular and even primitive background of their intellectualism, its relation to the old idea of the magic power of knowledge, the speculation of the Upanishads in its highest forms reached a point which must have placed it out of touch with the mentality of most of the people. "Knowledge" of the abstract truth about the Soul proves a very different matter from "knowledge" of the things which are the ordinary aims of magic, when the human mind tries to grasp it. Any man can "know" the "name" of his enemy, or of the disease which afflicts him, and by that "knowledge" can seek to cast a spell over them. But only a rare thinker can "know" the absolute metaphysical Truth, so that it is an ever-present illumination of his whole being,[31] and this is what he must do in order to have the true "knowledge" that brings control of his own soul, of his destiny—the "knowledge" that means salvation. For ordinary human nature, there is needed a process of education, of discipline, which shall lead up to this enlightenment. Various sects make use of morality in this way, as a preliminary help. It purifies the soul and prepares it for enlightenment. Many Upanishad passages imply such a position, at least by saying that the wicked cannot hope for true knowledge—even though other passages speak of knowledge as a sort of magic power by which one "sloughs off sin, as a snake sloughs off its skin." [32]

There are other preliminary steps or practices which various sects regard as useful in preparing the soul for the reception of the enlightenment which will finally bring release. And in some of the later Hindu sects these preliminary steps become so prominent that they obscure, or almost obliterate, what was originally the true goal —the attainment of metaphysical knowledge. Of these avenues of

[31] "By a rare chance may a man see It (the Soul); by a rare chance likewise may another declare It; and by a rare chance may another hear It. But even when he has heard It, no one whatsoever knows It." Bhagavad Gītā, 2.29; quoted from Katha Upanishad, 2.7.

[32] Prashna Upanishad, 5.5.

approach to knowledge, which however occasionally lead off into seductive bypaths, the chief, in addition to righteous conduct, are two. One is devotion to the personality of some god or prophet, who is regarded as a kind of personal savior or helper on the way to salvation. The other is the practice of asceticism in some form or other, regarded as an approach to a state of inaction (and so to the ideal, since all actions lead to rebirth), and also as helping to prepare for enlightenment by freeing the individual from attachment to the world, by gradually conquering the natural desires of the flesh.

The first of these two secondary methods, as we may call them, plays a very small rôle in the older Upanishads. The Upanishads recognize no prophet who could occupy the place which the Buddha holds for his followers as a personal Savior, quite analogous to the places of Jesus and Mohammed in Christianity and Islam. And most of them, particularly the earliest, do not think of the One—Brahman, or Atman, or the Existent, or whatever they call It—in sufficiently personal terms to make it easy to think of It as exercising grace in saving men, or as the object of any very personal devotion on the part of men. But for the Bhagavad Gītā, which is frankly monotheistic,[33] the case is very different; and we shall find that in it the "grace of God" is repeatedly spoken of as singling out His elect and bringing them to salvation by His divine choice. And no means for attaining salvation is more emphasized in the Gītā than *bhakti*, "devotion" to God, or fervent love of Him. Originally, no doubt, this devotion was to lead to knowledge, intellectual enlightenment, and so to release. But the intermediate step is often lost sight of in the Gītā and in similar later works; they not infrequently think of ecstatic love of God as leading immediately to absorption in Him, which is their conception of salvation. It is interesting to note, then, that even this position, contrary though it is to the usual spirit of the Upanishads, finds expression in them, and precisely in two of them which were pretty certainly known to the author of the Gītā. One speaks of enlightenment as coming "by the grace of God," and recommends "devotion" (*bhakti*) to Him as a means for attaining it.[34] The other speaks of "beholding the greatness of the Soul

[33] This is certainly a reasonable statement in dealing with a work in which the principal speaker is represented as an incarnation of the Supreme Deity; although there are not wanting in the Gītā, as we shall see in Chapter VI, passages in which the First Principle seems to be spoken of in impersonal, monistic terms.

[34] Shvetāshvatara Upanishad, 6.21, 23. This is a comparatively late Upanishad, probably not much older than the Gītā; there are various good reasons for believing that it was known to the Gītā's author.

(*ātman*) by the grace of the Creator (*dhātar*)," [35] and shortly after this the same text, not even using the term "Creator" or "God," or any other personal expression for the Supreme, says that "this Soul (*ātman;* here the Universal Soul) is not to be attained by instruction, by intellect, or by much holy learning; He is to be attained only by him whom He chooses; for him He reveals His own form." [36]

The other "secondary method" of gaining enlightenment, the method of withdrawal from the world by some form of asceticism, is more complicated in its history. In the oldest periods of Vedic speculation we hear much of a concept called *tapas.* Already in the great monistic hymn of the Rig Veda, 10.129, the One is produced out of the primal chaos by the power of *tapas.* The word means literally "heat," and in cosmogonic connections it undoubtedly suggests the creative warmth that is symbolized by the brooding of a bird over its eggs. The idea of the development of the universe out of a cosmic egg appears not infrequently in early Hindu cosmogonies, and with it is clearly associated the idea of *tapas,* warmth, as a force of cosmic evolution. But in religious language the same word had the figurative meaning of "religious, devotional fervor." It is the inspiration of the priest or holy man. It was thus nearly related to the concept of *brahman,* the holy word as the quintessence of religious spirit. It is possible that it had a partly physical connotation in this sense, too; the religious fervor probably was sometimes brought on or increased by physical exertion; and even the sacrificial ritual itself, being performed over the sacred fire, resulted in literal, physical "heat" for the officiating priests (the texts refer to this specifically). For these various reasons the power of *tapas,* "warmth" or "fervor," is prominently mentioned in early Vedic cosmogonies as a cosmic force. Sometimes it is made a sort of First Principle itself. More often the Creator is spoken of as "exercising *tapas*" in creating the universe.

But about the time of the early Upanishads the word *tapas* began to acquire a new connotation. From this period seems to date the development in India of a recognized class of hermits or monks, men who renounced the world and lived a life devoted to meditation or some form of asceticism. The prominence of such people in later India is well known. They do not appear clearly in the early Vedic texts; and their appearance in large numbers is certainly related to the growth of world-weariness among the Hindu intellectuals,

[35] Katha Upanishad, 2.20. The Gītā has several verbal quotations from this Upanishad.

[36] *Ibid.,* 2.23.

which accompanied and signalized the general views of life outlined in this chapter. If all ordinary life is vanity and vexation of spirit, and the only hope of salvation lies in knowledge of the Soul, which is to be attained through mystic contemplation, naturally the intelligent man will be inclined to turn his back on the world and devote himself to a more or less hermit-like existence. There are, moreover, very special reasons for asceticism. Actions lead to rebirth; so inaction, or the nearest possible approach to it, withdrawal from the world, is desirable. Furthermore, as we have seen, desires are the root of evil, because they enchain man to the things of this life, and distract his attention from his true goal. He must, therefore, seek to overcome his desires. One way of doing this is to avoid the objects of desire as much as possible, by living a solitary life, preferably in the wilderness. Another way is by positive acts of self-repression, even self-torture, to "mortify the flesh" and reduce it to subjection. Another is by means of self-hypnosis to induce a state of trance, or half-trance, in which one may attain nearly complete, if only temporary, freedom from the distractions of the world, and a sort of approach to the "unconscious consciousness" of union with the One. All of these varying forms of ascetic austerities have been more or less practised by many Hindu sects, sometimes in very extreme forms. They are all included under the concept of *tapas*, "heat, fervor," as it is used in the Upanishads and later. As so used the word contains both a physical and a spiritual connotation. Physical, in that many ascetics engaged in often very strenuous exertions, or deliberately subjected themselves to the heat of the sun and of fire, to subdue their physical passions. Spiritual, in that their theoretical aim, at least, was always to produce the desired religious fervor or ecstasy through which they hoped to gain enlightenment. In theory, all such practices were only a means, the end being enlightenment. They prepared the soul for this end by subduing desires and inducing a spiritual attitude favorable to the reception of enlightenment. But in this case, too, as in the case of the theory of divine grace and devotion to the Deity, the means became the end in some later sects, which came to think of salvation as resulting directly from asceticism, not from enlightenment brought on by asceticism. There are sects which teach that salvation is sure to come to one who starves himself to death—the *ne plus ultra* of ascetic practice. This extreme, however, is exceptional.[37]

[37] In the popular mind ascetic practices came to be regarded as a means of acquiring all sorts of supernatural or magic powers; just as knowledge (the acquisition of which was the theoretical object of ascetic practices) was con-

We see, then, that the word *tapas,* "fervor," had both a physical and a spiritual aspect in both the early Vedic speculations and their later successors, but that there was a change in the connotation on each side. The Upanishads took up the early concept of "fervor" or "warmth" and reinterpreted it in terms of their own ideas. Common to both periods is the use of the primarily physical concept to characterize a certain type of religious life, though a different type in each period. The early use of the concept in cosmogonic connections may also be presumed to have contributed to the use of it in the Upanishads as a tentative definition of the First Principle, or a means of knowing it. ("Seek to know the *brahman* by fervor [austerity, *tapas*]; *brahman* is fervor [austerity]!")[38] Not a few Upanishad passages speak of attaining the *ātman* through *tapas,* either alone or in conjunction with other potencies. For them, however, it remains a subordinate concept, on the whole. The sentence just quoted is not at all typical of their general attitude. In this respect the Bhagvad Gītā agrees with them. Indeed, the usual attitude of the Gītā is definitely opposed to asceticism; it seeks to justify participation in normal, worldly life, though with qualification. Only rarely does it speak in terms which seem to recommend withdrawal from the world.[39]

To summarize this chapter: the Upanishads show us the beginnings of the fundamental principles of later, classical Hinduism. These may be grouped under three general headings. First, pessimism: all ordinary life is evil. Second, transmigration, with the doctrine of karma: living souls are subject to an indefinite series of lives, all more or less like this life, the condition of the individual in each being determined by his moral conduct in previous existences. Third, salvation: the only hope for release from this endless chain of evil existences is (primarily) by "knowledge," that is, intuitive realization of the supreme metaphysical truth; as preparations or aids to the attainment of this knowledge are recognized morality, devotion to a supreme personality, and ascetic austerities, although all of these are usually kept in a quite subordinate position in the Upanishads. In various later sects one or another of them at times assumes such importance as to obscure the original means of salvation, "knowledge." Except in this last respect, virtually all Hindu sects and philosophies agree regarding these basic postulates, however much they may differ on other matters.

ceived by the vulgar in terms of magic power. Some of the later systems of philosophy which attach great importance to austerities are not free from this degradation of the idea.

[38] Taittirīya Upanishad, 3.2ff.

[39] See Chapter VII.

CHAPTER IV

Prehistory of the God of the Bhagavad Gita

IT COULD hardly be expected that the popular consciousness would be gripped by Upanishadic thought. It was too intellectual, too impersonal, to appeal to any but a small proportion of the population. The great mass of mankind demanded, as always, a personal, quasi-human god or gods to worship; it could not be satisfied by a refined, mystic contemplation of a nameless Soul, even if it be the Soul of the universe. Some more acceptable outlet for the religious feeling of the people had to be provided; and there is good reason to believe that it was provided. Unfortunately, the evidence about it is mostly indirect and secondary. We can judge of it, for the most part, only from its traces in such later works as the Bhagavad Gītā, which clearly presuppose a considerable development of popular religion, distinct from the higher thought of the Upanishads but contemporary therewith. In the Gītā these two streams are blended. We have no records that show us the popular beliefs of that period in a pure form.

For this reason, it is scarcely possible to attempt any extensive reconstruction of those popular beliefs. The principal thing to be said about them is that they were certainly theistic, and presumably tended towards a monotheism, of a more or less qualified sort. That is, presumably various local or tribal deities were worshipped in different parts of India, each occupying a position somewhat similar to that of Yahweh among the Jews—each being regarded as the chief or perhaps the sole god of his people or tribe, though the existence of the gods of other tribes was not exactly denied. These local deities were, we may assume, of very different types and origins. Sometimes they may have been old gods of aboriginal, non-Aryan tribes. Sometimes they seem to have been local heroes, deified after death.

Such a local deity must have been the Krishna who appears as the Supreme Deity, the "Blessed One," in the Bhagavad Gītā. He was apparently a deified local chieftain, the head of the Vrishni clan. Indeed, he appears as such, in strictly human guise, in the greater part of the Mahābhārata. In the Gītā he is still both god and man; an incarnation of the Deity in human form. We know nothing of the process by which he attained divine honors, nor of his earlier history as a god, before the Bhagavad Gītā, which is probably the earliest work preserved to us in which he appears as such. In this work he has all the attributes of a full-fledged monotheistic deity, and at the same time, as we shall see, the attributes of the Upanishadic Absolute. In other words, the popular God is philosophized into a figure who can appeal to both the higher and the lower circles of the population. Therein lies the strength of Krishnaism in later India; it is many-sided enough to satisfy the religious requirements of almost any man, whatever his intellectual or social status may be.

The Upanishads themselves are not entirely free from quasi-monotheistic touches, some of which may perhaps be interpreted as concessions to this same popular demand for a personal god. Especially interesting, and important for later Hinduism, is the personalization of the philosophic term Brahman, as a name for the Absolute, which appears even in some of the earliest Upanishads. The word *brahman* is primarily and originally neuter in gender, and remains so usually throughout the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gītā; but occasionally it acquires a personality, as a sort of creating and ruling deity, and then it has masculine gender. It thus becomes the god Brahmā, familiar to later Hinduism as the nominal head of the Triad consisting of Brahmā the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. This trinity appears only in comparatively late Upanishads, and no clear mention of it is found in the Bhagavad Gītā, although the Gītā at least once refers to the masculine and personal Brahmā, "the Lord sitting on the lotus-seat." [40] But this grammatical trick was not sufficient to satisfy the craving of the human soul. Even masculinized, Brahman-Brahmā remained too bloodless to attract many worshipers. Later Hinduism pays lip-homage to him, but reserves its real worship for his colleagues, Vishnu and Shiva.

Vishnu and Shiva, under various names and forms, are the real gods of later India. Shiva-worship, though certainly much older than the Bhagavad Gītā, does not appear therein, and may therefore be left out of consideration in this book. But we must say a few

[40] 11.15.

words about Vishnu, since he was identified with Krishna, the Gītā's God, or regarded as incarnate in Him. This identification seems to me to appear clearly in the Gītā itself.[41]

Vishnu was one of the gods of the Rig Veda, and, like most of them, a nature-god. He was a personification of the sun. But the Rig Veda contains a number of sun-gods (perhaps originally belonging to different tribes, or else representing different aspects of the sun's power). Vishnu is one of the less prominent and less important ones. He is distinctly a minor figure in the Rig Veda. We hear that he measures the universe in three great strides, which refer figuratively to the sun's progress across the sky. The third stride lands him in "the highest foot-step (or, place; the word has both meanings) of Vishnu," which means the zenith. This is thought of as the highest point in the universe, and at times it is conceived as a kind of solar paradise, to which the spirits of the blessed dead may go. So in post-Rig-Vedic literature, we hear expressions of the desire for attaining "Vishnu's highest place." So, also, in this period, Vishnu is occasionally declared to be "the highest of the gods"; this is doubtless to be understood in a literal, physical sense, because Vishnu's abode is the "top of the world." In the same period, we find very frequently the statement that "Vishnu is the sacrifice." Why he should have been singled out for this honor, we cannot tell; there are other gods whose far greater prominence would seem to us to give them a better claim to be regarded as a personification of the ritual. But the frequency of the statement leaves no room for doubt that the priests of the "Middle Vedic" (Brāhmana) period generally thought of Vishnu in this way. And since, as we have seen, to them the "sacrifice" was the central power of the universe, we see that from their point of view no higher compliment was possible. Evidently Vishnu was acquiring a much more dignified position than he had in the Rig Veda.

The Upanishads add nothing to the history of Vishnu. They—that is, the older ones, those which antedate the Gītā—mention his name only three or four times, and quite in the style of the Middle-Vedic period. But suddenly, in the Gītā and other contemporary writings, we find Vishnu recognized as a supreme monotheistic deity, worshipped either under his own name, or in the form of various incarnations, the chief of which is Krishna. This was at a time when the Vedic religion, as a whole, was nearly dead. Its gods no

[41] A distinguished Hindu scholar, Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, thinks that Krishna is not yet identified with Vishnu in the Gītā, though he was soon afterwards. See his *Vaisnavism, S'aivism and Minor Religious Systems*, page 13.

longer had a real hold on any class of the people. Their existence was not denied, but they were reduced to the rank of petty spirits. Even the once all-important sacrifices were largely falling into disuse. But if the ritual religion was perishing, the priestly class was not. By this time it was recognized as a definite and hereditary caste, the brahmanhood, which claimed the headship of human society. With this fact, probably, is to be connected the identification of the god or hero Krishna, and other popular gods and heroes, with the old Vedic god Vishnu. Thus a sacerdotal tinge was given to the thriving monotheism which had such a hold on the mass of the people. Brahmanism stooped to conquer; it absorbed popular cults which it had not the strength to uproot. The simple and ancient device of identification of one god with another furnished the means to this end.

It remains something of a mystery to scholars why Vishnu, rather than some other Vedic deity, was selected for this purpose. Even after the development described in the last paragraph but one, Vishnu is by no means the most prominent god of the pantheon. Many steps in the long process have evidently disappeared from our sight. But probably his frequent identification with the sacrifice, and his growing eschatological importance as the ruler of a kind of paradise for the dead in his "highest place," have something to do with it.

We have, then, finally, a union of at least three strands in the monotheistic deity of the Bhagavad Gītā: a popular god-hero of a local tribe, an ancient Vedic deity belonging to the hieratic ritual religion, and the philosophic Absolute of the Upanishads. The blend is, as we shall see, by no means perfect. Especially the monistic, Upanishadic element is sometimes rather clearly distinguished from the theistic element or elements; the author of the Gītā himself seems to have been conscious of this distinction at times.[42] But for the most part it is hard to disentangle one from the other.

[42] See Chapter VI.

SECOND PART

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

CHAPTER V

Soul and Body

WE SAW that the Upanishads center their attention on a search for the central, fundamental, and animating principle of the universe, and of man; that these two objects of research are conceived in them as parallel, the universal macrocosm being compared to the human microcosm; and that this parallelism tends to turn into an identity, which results in an equation between the "soul" or real self of man and that of the universe. So frequent and striking are the expressions of this idea in the Upanishads that it is often, though I think not without exaggeration, regarded as the prime motif of Upanishadic thought.

In spite of the fact that the Bhagavad Gītā is saturated with the atmosphere of the Upanishads, this great idea of theirs is not exactly prominent in it. It is not unknown to it; several passages in which it speaks of the human soul come very close to that idea.[43] It would indeed be strange if it had avoided the idea altogether. It is curious enough that it has so nearly suppressed it, in view of its obvious debt to Upanishadic thought. The chief reason for the suppression evidently lies in the fact that this monistic idea is felt to be irreconcilable with the ardent, devotional theism of the Gītā. Even though, as we shall see, the Gītā conceives God as immanent in all beings, and its author hopes for ultimate union with Him, still he seems to shrink from the bold assertion "I am God," which requires more courage than the Upanishadic "I am Brahman," simply because Brahman is impersonal and the Gītā's God is definitely personal. Union with God is projected into the future, and is not conceived on

[43] 2.17: "But know thou that That One (the human soul is referred to) by which all this universe is pervaded is imperishable. Of this immortal one no one can cause the destruction."—2.24: "Eternal, omnipresent, unmoved, unshakable, everlasting is He (the human soul)."—13.27: "Residing alike in all beings, the supreme Lord (the human soul), not perishing when they (the beings) perish,—who perceives this has true vision."

a basis of equality between the soul and God.[44] Once the Gītā speaks of the human soul as a *part* of God.[45] Generally God is conceived as a personality wholly distinct from the human soul, and infinitely superior to it.

The Upanishadic notion of the human soul is, however, clearly retained in the Gītā as far as concerns its individual nature. It is still the essential part of man, that which does not perish at death. Indeed, the dignity and importance of the soul is brought out if possible even more strongly than is usual in the Upanishads, in one respect; namely, in the contrast that is emphasized between the soul and what is not soul. This contrast is rather a minor matter in most of the Upanishads. They are so charmed by the contemplation of the soul, which they find in everything, that they virtually ignore the existence of everything that is not soul,[46] or else brush it aside with the summary remark that "whatever is other than that (the soul) is evil."[47] At any rate, most of them are not enough interested in the non-soul to speculate much about its nature. The Gītā, on the other hand, has definite theories about the structure of the non-soul or body,—largely inherited, to be sure, from older times, and to some extent hinted at in certain of the Upanishads. These are used to contrast the body with the soul; and the comparison, of course, is much to the advantage of the soul. Thus in the opening part of the dialog, Krishna instructs Arjuna that he should not grieve for the soul, because it is immortal, and inaccessible to the sufferings which afflict the body. "It is declared that these bodies come to an end; but the Embodied (Soul) in them is eternal, indestructible, unfathomable."[48] "He (the soul) is not born, nor does he ever die; nor, once being, shall he evermore cease to be. Unborn, eternal, everlasting from oldest times, he is not slain when the body is slain."[49]

[44] Some of the Christian mystics seem more courageous. Compare Jacob Boehme's

"Ich bin so gross wie Gott,
Er ist wie ich so klein."

[45] 15.7: "A part just of Me, which is the eternal soul in living beings," etc.

[46] Some scholars say that they even *deny* the real existence of anything other than the soul, as the later Vedānta philosophy does. I do not agree with this view.

[47] Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 3.4.2.

[48] 2.18.

[49] 2.20. Compare also 2.11, 25, 30. It is painful to have to add that this doctrine is here applied to a justification of war, and of killing in general; since the soul cannot be killed, and the body does not matter (and since, moreover, it must die in any case, 2.26, 27), "therefore fight," says Krishna (2.18). A charitable explanation would be that this is a concession to the dramatic situa-

We find, in fact, that the Gītā's most usual and characteristic position is definitely dualistic. There are two eternal principles, eternally distinct from each other: "soul" (usually called *purusha*, "man, person, spirit"; sometimes *ātman*, "self"; other synonyms also occur), and what may perhaps be called "non-soul" rather than "body," since, as we shall see presently, it includes mental faculties; the usual Hindu term is *prakriti*, "nature, material nature, matter." The soul is absolutely unitary, undifferentiated, and without qualities; not subject to any change or alteration, and not participating in any action. Material nature, or the non-soul, is what performs all acts. It assumes manifold forms, and is constantly subject to change —evolution, devolution, and variation.

The variety of material nature is expressed in two ways. First, it is composed of three elements called *gunas*, that is, "threads, strands," or "qualities":[50] namely, *sattva*, "purity, goodness"; *rajas*, "activity, passion"; and *tamas*, "darkness, dullness, inactivity." Mingled in varying proportions, these three qualities make up all matter. Preponderance of one or another of these qualities determines the character of any given part of material nature.[51] But material nature also includes what we consider the mental faculties of living beings, particularly of man. This is made clear in one passage in the Gītā,[52] where we find a second and much more elaborate statement of the constituents of material nature—or rather, this time, of its evolvents; for, though this is not clearly stated here, it is obvious that we are dealing with an evolutionary theory which is very familiar in later Hindu philosophy. According to this, out of the primal, undifferentiated "matter" develops first the "will" or faculty of consciousness (the term, *buddhi*, approximately covers both of these English terms); then the "I-faculty," the organ of self-

tion of the poem, as inserted in the Mahābhārata; and this could be supported by various texts in the Gītā which are distinctly hostile to violence. But we shall see that there are other ethical, as well as metaphysical, inconsistencies in the Gītā. See Chapter XI.

[50] The word seems to me both concrete and abstract in the Gītā; the *gunas* are both material "constituent elements," like strands of a rope, and qualifying characteristics. No clear distinction was made at this time between these two concepts (cf. Oldenberg, *Upanishaden und Buddhismus*, p. 217f.). The later Sānkhya philosophy insists that the *gunas* are physical, constituent parts of matter, not what we call qualities.

[51] The results of the preponderance of each of the three qualities in various parts of *prakriti* are set forth in some detail in the Gītā, 14.6-18, and the whole of chapter 17. Generally speaking, the theory is that the best and highest forms of matter or nature are those in which *sattva*, "purity," predominates; in the worst and lowest forms *tamas*, "dullness," predominates; the predominance of *rajas*, "activity" or "passion," is found in a large variety of forms whose ethical values are mostly intermediate or indeterminate.

[52] 13.5, 6.

consciousness (*ahamkāra*); then the thinking organ (*manas*, sometimes etymologically translated "mind"), which mediates between sense-perception and the self-consciousness, and is regarded as the function of a special, "inner" sense-organ; with it the faculties of the ten sense-organs,[53] five intellectual (of sight, smell, hearing, taste and feeling) and five organs of action (of speech [function of the larynx], grasping [of the hands], locomotion [of the feet], evacuation, and generation); also the five "subtle elements," the abstract essences of the material objects (or as we say, reversing the direction, stimulants) of the five senses (sound, as the object of hearing, etc.); and finally the five gross elements, earth, air, fire, water, and ether.[54] All of these forms of material nature—twenty-four in all, including the "undifferentiated" form—are alike composed of the three above-mentioned "qualities" (*gunas*), in varying proportions. It will be seen that the two classifications are not inconsistent, but cross one another, the one being, so to speak, vertical, the other horizontal.

It is, as I have said, only "material nature" or "matter" that acts. "Actions are performed entirely by the qualities (*gunas*) of material nature. He whose soul is deluded by the I-faculty imagines that he is the doer."[55] That is, owing to the confusion created by the activity of the organ of self-consciousness—*which is part of matter, not of the soul*—one imagines that "he" himself (his soul, his real self, or *ātman*) performs actions. "But he who knows the truth of the distinction between (the soul, on the one hand, and) the qualities (of matter) and action (on the other), knowing that (in any action) it is (not the soul that acts but) the qualities of matter that act upon the qualities, is not enthralled."[56] "And who perceives that acts are exclusively performed by material nature alone, and so that his soul does nothing, he has true vision."[57] "The disciplined man who knows the truth shall think: 'I am not doing anything at all,' whether he be seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping, breathing, speaking, evacuating, seizing, opening or closing his eyes; he holds fast to the thought that it is the (material) senses

[53] The Gītā seems to include both the physical organs and their functions in the same verbal expressions. I shall not here discuss the later Hindu usage.

[54] I shall refrain from describing the precise stages of this evolutionary process as set forth in the later Sānkhya philosophy. It is not clear to what extent they had been formulated in the time of the Gītā. One verse of the Gītā (3.42) lists a few of these "evolvents" in climactic order, but without asserting any genetic relationship,—in fact, perhaps implying rather that none exists, since the "highest" member of the series is there the Soul, which is elsewhere clearly stated to be unrelated to matter.

[55] 3.27. [56] 3.28. [57] 13.29.

that are operating on the objects of sense." [58] "When the Beholder (the soul) perceives that no other than the qualities (of matter) acts and knows that which is above the qualities, he attains unto My estate." [59]

What, then, is the function of the soul? As the passage last quoted indicates, it "beholds" the activities of matter, passively, and without participation. "Passively" in the sense that it has no relation to those activities at all; not in the sense that it is affected by them, for its true, fundamental nature is just as free from the effects of action as from its performance. "The Lord (the soul) does not receive (i. e., reap the fruit of) any one's sin, nor yet (of) his virtuous action." [60] "Swords cut him not, fire burns him not, waters wet him not, wind dries him not. He cannot be cut, he cannot be burnt, he cannot be wet, nor yet dried. Eternal, omnipresent, unmoved, unshakable, everlasting is he (the human soul)." [61] Elsewhere the soul is called the "knower" of matter: "This body is called the Field. He who knows it (i. e., the soul), him those who know the truth call the Field-knower." [62] The soul, then, merely looks on and "knows" matter and its acts, but has no real connection with them.

And yet, inconsistently as it seems at first sight, the soul is spoken of as experiencing pleasure and pain, which result from material contacts and processes. "Know that both material nature and the soul are eternal; know that both the evolvents (will, I-faculty, organ of thought and other sense-organs, and subtle and gross elements) and the qualities (*gunas*) spring from material nature. Material nature is declared to be the cause of things to be done, of action, and of agency; the soul is declared to be the cause of enjoyment (i. e., experiencing) of pleasure and pain. For the soul, residing in material nature, enjoys the qualities (*gunas*) that are born of material nature. The reason is its attachment to the qualities, in its various births in good and evil stations." [63] The key to the seeming inconsistency (which is really due to a certain laxity or inaccuracy in the passage just quoted) is indicated in the last sentence, the thought of which is more fully expressed in another passage, where it is said that the soul "draws to itself the (five) senses, with the organ of thought as the sixth, which spring from material nature. . . . Resorting to hearing, sight, touch, taste, and smell, and the organ of thought (all of which are really material), it pursues the objects of sense. Fools do not perceive that it (the soul) is attended by the

[58] 5.8, 9.
[59] 14.19.
[60] 5.15.
[61] 2.23, 24.
[62] 13.1.
[63] 13.19-22.

qualities (*gunas*, of matter) when it is passing out or remaining fixed (in the body) or enjoying (the objects of sense). Those whose eye is knowledge see this." [64] It is only because the soul is associated with matter that it "enjoys," or rather (it would be more accurate to say) *seems* to "enjoy," material processes. "Those who are deluded by the qualities (*gunas*) of material nature are enthralled in the actions of the qualities." [65] In other words, it is, strictly speaking, not the soul that "enjoys"—experiences—anything. That it seems to do so is due to the confusion caused by the organ of self-consciousness, the "I-faculty," which is a product of material nature and really quite disconnected with the soul, and from which in turn spring all the sense-organs and their objects. Were it not for this, the soul would perceive that it has no relation whatever to the activities and sufferings of matter. Since to the Gītā the general Hindu pessimistic view of life is axiomatic, it follows that this "enjoyment" is in reality naught but evil and suffering, and that the association of the soul with matter is a bondage. "Purity (*sattva*), activity (passion, *rajas*) and dullness (*tamas*),— these qualities, springing from material nature, bind in the body the immortal soul." [66] It is only the unenlightened man whom they *can* bind. When one attains true enlightenment, that is, realization of the true nature of the soul and matter and their fundamental independence of each other, then, by virtue of this perfect, mystic knowledge, he obtains release; his soul transcends matter and is freed from it for good and all, and he is freed from the chain of rebirths. "Who thus understands the soul and material nature together with the qualities (of the latter),—in whatever state he may be, he is not (to be) born again." [67] "The Embodied (Soul), transcending these three qualities (of matter) that spring from the body, freed from birth, death, old age, and sorrow, attains immortality (here a poetic expression for *nirvāna*)." [68] "Mentally abandoning all actions (that is, taking no interest in any action which the body may perform), the Embodied (Soul) sits at peace, self-controlled, in his nine-doored citadel (the body), and neither acts nor causes action at all." [69]

Note that this is a distinctly anthropomorphic dualism. As we have already seen, it is characteristic of Hindu speculation that it thinks of the whole universe in human terms; this was particularly true of the Upanishads, and remains true, generally speaking, of all

[64] 15.7-10. [66] 14.5. [68] 14.20.
[65] 3.29. [67] 13.23.
[69] 5.13. We shall have more to say of the various means of salvation found in the Gītā in Chapters VIII and IX.

later systems. This attitude assumes various forms. The Gītā says: "All creatures whatsoever, motionless (inanimate objects and plants) or moving (animals), are produced by the union of the Field (material nature) and the Field-knower (the soul)." [70] This seems to attribute to all nature not only mental faculties,—will, self-consciousness, and thinking organ,—which are parts of material nature and its primary evolvents, but also a soul that is distinct from material nature. Some Hindu sects—particularly the Jains—clearly and definitely accept the extreme implications of this theory, and believe that even inanimate objects are inhabited by souls, which are subject to transmigration like animal souls. Most Hindu systems do not carry it as far as that, at least in definite statements. But to all of them man is the only part of the universe that really counts. Animals (usually plants also) are to them potential humans; and the rest of the world they virtually ignore in their speculations. We need not consider here the extreme idealistic monism of Shankara's Vedānta philosophy, according to which there is only One that truly exists, namely Brahman, the world soul, with which the human soul is really identical; all else is illusion (*māyā*), existing only in appearance, as a mirage, and not in reality. This system developed long after the Gītā, as it seems to me, although it claims to be founded on the Upanishads. In a sense it is founded on them; it is only the logical conclusion, or extreme application, of their doctrine that the essential part of man is one with the essential part of the universe. But the Upanishads did not say "the non-soul does not exist." They only tended to ignore its existence or its importance—to wave it aside as unworthy of their consideration; they were not interested in it. This explains why the Upanishads could be made the basis for such diametrically opposite systems as the monism of Shankara's Vedānta on the one hand and the Gītā's dualism on the other. The latter was reduced to more systematic forms by the later Sānkhya and Yoga philosophies, both of which recognize the reality and independence of soul and matter. They differ on the existence of God, which is accepted by the Yoga but denied by the Sānkhya. The Gītā agrees with the Yoga in this respect. All of these views derive from the Upanishadic speculations centering about the human soul; and all agree that the non-soul, or material nature, is something from which the soul should utterly detach itself, whether it really exists (Gītā, Sānkhya, and Yoga) or is merely illusory (Vedānta).

[70] 13.26.

CHAPTER VI

The Nature of God

WE HAVE spoken of the metaphysics of the Gītā as dualistic, as recognizing two fundamental principles, the soul and the non-soul (body, or material nature). But it is impossible to read far in the Gītā without finding that this description does not fully represent its author's metaphysics, at least in his most typical mood. It leaves out of account his idea of God, which is as it were superimposed upon the dualistic system outlined in the last chapter.

How does God fit into this system? Is He a sort of third principle, higher than the other two and distinct from them? So we are told at times, perhaps most clearly in the following passage: "There are two *souls*[71] here in the world, a perishable and an imperishable one. The perishable (i. e., material nature) is all beings. The imperishable (i. e., the soul, spirit) is called the Uniform (unchangeable). But there is another, a supreme Soul, called the Highest Spirit (Paramātman), the Eternal Lord who enters into the three worlds and supports them." [72] Here the Supreme Soul, God, is definitely set off against the individual soul and matter, as a third principle. Somewhat similarly in another passage, we first have a statement of the ordinary dualism: "This body is called the Field; him who knows it (the soul) those who know the truth call the Field-knower"—which is immediately followed by this: "Know that I (God) am the Field-knower in all Fields." [73]

[71] The word used is *purusha*, which elsewhere means strictly "soul" and is not applied to the body or material nature; yet here the "perishable soul" can obviously mean nothing but *prakriti*, material nature. This is an example of the loose language which not infrequently confuses the expression of the Gītā's thoughts, and reminds us that we are reading a mystic poem, not a logical treatise on metaphysics.

[72] 15.16, 17.

[73] 13.1, 2.

But even in these very passages let it be noted that God, though in a sense something other than either material nature or the individual souls of men, is at the same time regarded as immanent in them. "Whoso sees Me in all and all in Me, for him I am not lost, and he is not lost for Me. Whoso, attaining to (the concept of) oneness, reveres Me as located in all beings, he, the disciplined, though he may abide everywhere (i. e., anywhere), abides in Me."[74] "Attaining to (the concept of) *oneness!*" Thus through its idea of God the Gītā seems after all to arrive at an ultimate monism. The essential part, the fundamental element, in every thing, is after all One—is God. "There is nothing else that is outside of Me; on Me this All is strung like necklaces of pearls on a string."[75] "Also the seed of all beings, that am I. There is no being, moving or motionless, that is without Me."[76] "I am the moisture in the waters, the light in the moon and sun, the sacred syllable Om in all the Vedas, sound in the ether, manliness in men. The goodly odor in the earth am I, and the brilliance in the fire; I am the soul in all beings, and the austerity in ascetics. Know Me as the eternal seed of all creatures. I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the glory of the glorious."[77] God is the animating principle in everything; it is He that "makes the wheels" of the universe "go 'round," that acts in all natural activities and processes: "The Lord resides in the heart of all beings and makes all beings go around by His mysterious power (*māyā*), as if they were fixed on a revolving machine."[78] "The splendor of the sun that illumines the whole world and the splendor that is in the moon and in fire, know that to be My splendor. Entering into the earth I support (all) beings by My power; becoming the juicy soma I make all plants to grow. Becoming fire (as the principle of digestion, regarded by the Hindus as a "cooking" by bodily heat) I enter into the bodies of animate creatures, and, joining with the upper and nether breaths, I digest their food of all four sorts. I have entered into the heart of every man; from Me come memory, knowledge, and negation (in reasoning). I alone am the object of the (sacred) knowledge of all the Vedas; I am the author of the Vedānta (summation of the esoteric doctrines of the Vedas), and I too am the sole knower of the Veda."[79] So, of course, God is repeatedly declared to be the Creator, Supporter, Ruler of all that is; the origin and dissolution of the universe,[80] "both death that

[74] 6.30, 31.
[75] 7.7.
[76] 10.39.
[77] 7.8-10.
[78] 18.61.
[79] 15.12-15.
[80] 7.6.

seizes all and the origin of creatures that are to be," [81] "both immortality and death, both the existent and the non-existent," [82] "the beginning and the middle and the end of beings." [83]

Such thoughts lead to the question of the existence of evil and how to reconcile it with the concept of an all-embracing God. Every theistic religion has its difficulties with the problem of evil. In describing the manifestations of God in the universe, the Gītā, quite naturally, tends to emphasize the good side of things; but at times it does not shrink from including the evil also. Since *all* comes from God, it seems impossible to deny that origin to anything. "Whatsoever beings (or, states of being) there are, be they of the nature of purity, activity, or dullness (the three *gunas* or qualities of matter, as set forth in the last chapter), know that all of them come from Me alone." [84] In another passage, God is declared to be the source of all mental states and experiences, *good and bad alike,* though the good predominates in the list: "Intelligence, knowledge, freedom from delusion, patience, truth, self-control, peace, pleasure, *pain,* existence (or, presence; or, coming-into-being), lack (non-being, or deficiency), *fear,* and fearlessness too; harmlessness, equanimity, satisfaction, penance, alms, fame, and *disrepute*—the states of creatures, of all various sorts, come from Me alone." [85] More definite recognition of the origin even of evil in God is found in this: "I am the gambling of gamblers, the majesty of the majestic; I am conquest, I am adventure (of conquerors and adventurers); I am the courage of the courageous. . . . I am the violence of conquerors, I am the statecraft of ambitious princes; I too am the silence of the taciturn (or, of silent ascetics), I am the knowledge of the learned." [86]

If even in these passages we seem to find a tendency to slur over the evil of the world and its necessary relation to a quasi-pantheistic God, in other places the Gītā feels it necessary to qualify its semi-pantheism by definitely ruling out evil from God's nature. Thus to a passage in the seventh chapter which is strongly suggestive of pantheism, and which I quoted on the preceding page—"I am the moisture in the waters, etc.; I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the glory of the glorious"—there is added this significant verse: "I am the strength of the strong, *free from lust and passion;* I am desire in (all) beings (but) *not* (such desire as is) *opposed to right-*

[81] 10.34.
[82] 9.19.
[83] 10.20, 10.32.
[84] 7.12.
[85] 10.4, 5.
[86] 10.36, 38.

eousness."[87] Thus the Gītā strengthens its appeal to the natural man, or to "common sense," at the expense of logic and consistency.

This stricture (if it be considered a stricture) seems to me not unfair, even though I doubt whether it can be said that the Gītā ever commits itself to absolute pantheism. It undoubtedly comes very close to it, as in some of the passages I have quoted. That God is *in* all, or all in God, it frequently says; and hence we may fairly ask whether God is also in that which is evil (or it in Him). But this is not exactly saying that God *is* all, that God is identical with all and all with God, there being no remainder on either side. Such a definitely pantheistic statement is not, I think, to be found in the Gītā. Certainly we find many expressions which seem to deny it. And that in two ways. In the first place, God's nature may be limited by the exclusion of certain parts of the universe or forms of existence. And secondly, God is thought of as extending beyond the universe, as including more than "all beings."

As to the first point, the word "limited" as applied to God's nature is my own, and would undoubtedly have been strenuously repudiated by the author of the Gītā. He would have said—indeed he does say again and again, in many different ways—that God is limitless, that He includes *all* forms. Yet we have seen that at times he feels compelled to deny that God manifests Himself in certain forms of existence which are felt as morally evil; although at other times he swallows even this dose. Whatever terminology one uses, the fact remains that the Gītā repeatedly manifests a tendency to find God only in the best or highest forms of existence. The worse and lower forms are at least implicitly left out. This tendency is so natural as to be almost inevitable in a writer who is, after all, pervaded by a spirit of ardent, personal theism—however tinged with quasi-pantheism. Philosophically, the doctrine that God is *in* all leaves a loophole which can be stretched to admit a good deal. God is the soul, the essential part of everything; this may be interpreted as meaning the highest or noblest part of everything. Now lay the emphasis on the word *part*, and the trick is turned. Any entity may be regarded as a part of some larger whole, just as any entity (except perhaps, for the time being at least, the modern electron) may be treated as a compound whole and analyzed into parts. By choosing your "whole" and making it sufficiently inclusive, God can be found in some "part" of every "whole," and yet excused from responsibility for anything that would seem unworthy of Him. I

[87] 7.11.

do not accuse the author of the Gītā of deliberately practising such sophistry. Of course, his mind did not work in that way consciously. But unconsciously I think something like this must have gone on in his thoughts. Otherwise it seems impossible to account for such passages as the long series of verses found in the tenth chapter,[88] in which God is identified with (*only!*) the first, highest, or best, of every conceivable class of beings: "Of lights I am the sun . . . of stars the moon, of Vedas the Sāma Veda, of gods Indra (the king of the old Vedic gods), of sense-organs the mind . . . of mountains Mount Meru," and so forth indefinitely.

On the other hand, the Gītā's theism differs from pantheism also in that it regards God as *more* than the universe. "Whatsoever creature possesses majesty or glory or greatness, know thou that every such creature springs from a *fraction* of My glory. . . . With *one part* of Myself I remain the support of this entire universe." [89] "I am not in them (all beings); they are in Me." [90] "By Me all this world is permeated, by Me whose form is unmanifest. All beings rest in Me; and I do not rest in them." [91] In the next verse after this last, the author retracts even this statement; it is too much to say even that the world is in God: "And (yet) beings do not rest in Me; behold My divine mystery! My nature is the support of beings, and does not rest in beings; it is the cause of being of beings." [92] This idea that the First Principle is more than all existing things, that the universe is only a *part* thereof, is at least as old as the "Purusha" hymn of the Rig Veda,[93] in which the entire universe is derived from only one-quarter of the cosmic Purusha or "Person."

This is by no means the only point in which the Gītā's conception of God shows relationships with older ideas of the First Principle. While, as we have seen, the older speculations, so far as we know them, tend to impersonal and non-theistic formulations of the One, still many of the expressions which they use in describing that One can quite well be applied to a personal God; and they and similar expressions are so applied in the Gītā. Many of the Gītā's descriptions of God sound as if they were taken bodily from the Upanishads. Thus: "Thou art the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Light, the Supreme Purifier; the eternal Purusha ("Person"), the divine, the Primal God, the Unborn Lord." [94] "The eternal Seer, the Governor, finer than an atom . . . the Establisher of all, whose

[88] 10.21-37.
[89] 10.41, 42.
[90] 7.12.
[91] 9.4.
[92] 9.5.
[93] R. V., 10.90.
[94] 10.12.

form is unthinkable, the Sun-colored, who is beyond darkness."[95] "I am the father of this world, the mother, the creator, the ancestor. . . . The goal, supporter, lord, overseer, dwelling-place, refuge, friend; the beginning, end, abiding-place, treasure-store, the eternal seed (of all)."[96] The term Brahman, favorite expression in the Upanishads for the Absolute, is frequently found in the Gītā; and often it is hard to say whether the author means to identify Brahman with God or not. The fact doubtless is that, as set forth in Chapter IV, the Upanishadic Brahman has contributed largely to the Gītā's concept of God, which has absorbed it along with other, more theistic elements. As a rule, no clear distinction is made between them. But in one or two places the Gītā shows a realization of a possible difference of opinion as to whether the Supreme is personal or impersonal. And, most interestingly, it definitely recognizes *both* beliefs as leading to salvation,—that is, as in some sense or other true, or at any rate not wholly false; although it prefers the personal theory. "Arjuna said: 'Those devotees who thus with constant devotion revere Thee, and those who revere the Imperishable, the Unmanifest (i. e., the impersonal Brahman), which of these are the best knowers of discipline?' The Blessed One replied: 'Those who fix their minds upon Me and revere Me with constant devotion, pervaded with supreme faith, them I consider the best-disciplined. But those who revere the Imperishable, Indescribable, Unmanifest, Omnipresent, and Unthinkable, the Immovable, Unchangeable, Immutable,—restraining completely all their senses, and keeping their minds indifferent in all circumstances, devoted to the welfare of all creatures,—they too reach Me after all. Greater is the toil for those who fix their minds on the Unmanifest. For the unmanifest path is hard for embodied creatures to attain'."[97] Could we ask for any clearer proof of the thesis set forth in Chapter IV? The abstract, impersonal Absolute of the Upanishads was more than the mind of the average man could grasp. The Gītā represents a sort of compromise between that speculative religion and popular theology. It provides an "easier way" to salvation, without denying the possibility of salvation to those hardier intellects which chose the more laborious, abstract path. We shall see later that in other ways, too, the Gītā tries to save men the trouble of mental exertion. It is quite characteristic of it to regard intellectual meth-

[95] 8.9.
[96] 9.17, 18.
[97] 12.1-5.

ods as difficult and unnecessary. It is "easier" for the ordinary man to worship a personal, anthropomorphic Deity than to fix his attention on an impersonal Absolute. So the Gītā, while allowing man to choose, recommends the belief in a personal God.

Elsewhere the impersonal Brahman is more or less distinctly subordinated to the personal God. Thus the following description is quite Upanishadic, except for the single phrase in which the Brahman is described as "consisting of Me": "The object of knowledge I will now set forth, knowing which one gains immortality; the beginningless Brahman, *that consists of Me;*[98] it is declared to be neither existent nor non-existent. It has hands and feet on all sides, eyes, heads, and faces on all sides, ears on all sides, in the world; it permanently covers everything. It has the semblance of all the qualities and senses (of material nature), but is free from all the senses; it is unattached, and yet it bears all; it has no qualities, yet it is the enjoyer of the qualities (of material nature). Both without and within all beings; immovable and yet moving; because of its subtility it cannot be known; it is both afar off and near. Both undivided and as it were divided, it resides in (all) beings, and it is to be known as the supporter of beings, causing their destruction and also their creation. It, too, is called the light of lights, that is beyond darkness; knowledge, and the object of knowledge, that is to be reached by knowledge; it is fixed variously in the heart of everyone."[99] The impersonal Brahman is nominally granted all the dignity which the Upanishads claim for it—and yet it depends on the personal God. "For I am the foundation of Brahman!"[100] Other passages in which the Brahman is spoken of as the Supreme Soul, the One that is in all creatures, or the "Possessor-of-the-Field," leave us more or less uncertain as to just how the author would have formulated his thought if hard pressed. "When one perceives that the various estates of creatures are all fixed in One, and that it is just from that One that they spread out, then he attains Brahman. Because it is without beginning and without qualities, this eternal supreme Soul (*ātman*), even though it resides in the body, does not act, nor is it stained (affected, by actions). As the omnipresent ether, because of its subtility, is not stained, so the Soul, residing in every body, is not stained. As the one sun illumines this whole

[98] Literally, "having Me as the chief (element?)"; it is hard to determine the precise *nuance* of the phrase, but it seems to me to imply some subordination of the Brahman to "Me" (God). Others, by a different division of words, exclude the reference to "Me" from this passage. But 14.27, quoted below, is unambiguous and proves my point.

[99] 13.12-17. [100] 14.27.

world, so the Possessor-of-the-Field illumines the whole Field (material body)." [101] Is this impersonal, Upanishadic monism? Or is the One implicitly thought of under a personal, theistic guise? Or, as in the foregoing, is God the "foundation" of It? In a preceding verse[102] we were told that "I (God) am the Field-knower in all Fields"; this suggests that the "Possessor-of-the-Field" is conceived as the personal God. Again: "But higher than this (world of perishable beings) is another, eternal being . . . which perishes not when all beings perish. It is called the unmanifest, the eternal; they call it the final goal, which having attained they do not return; *it is My supreme station* (or, *light*). This supreme soul (*purusha*) is to be attained by single devotion; within it all beings rest; by it this universe is pervaded." [103] Again, we might think that we were reading a non-theistic Upanishad, but for the little phrase, "it is My supreme station (or, light)." Does this mean something else than that "Brahman is God"? Let the mystic answer. The fact seems to be that the author subconsciously avoids careful definition of these terms. Or, to put it otherwise, he does not feel able to get rid of the Upanishadic Absolute, but he strives, doubtless unconsciously, to color it with his personal theism.

Elsewhere the idea of man as a dualism, a combination of "soul" and "body" or "material nature," leads to a macrocosmic dualism in which God, the Soul of the Universe, is set over against the cosmic or universal Prakriti, "Material Nature" as a whole, which is then thought of as *God's body*, as it were—God's material nature. So God too is dualistic; He has a double nature, a "lower" or material, and a "higher" or spiritual. "Earth, waters, fire, wind, ether, mind, will, and self-consciousness: thus is divided My material nature, eight-fold. This is (My) lower (nature). But know My other nature, higher than that. It is the Soul by which this world is sustained." [104] And just as the material nature of man confuses and deceives him, so that he thinks that what is really matter is himself (his soul), so he confuses God's body—manifest material nature—with God's unmanifest Self. "Deluded by these conditions of existence, that consist of the Three Qualities (*gunas*, of material nature), this whole world fails to know Me, who am superior to them and eternal. For this is My divine illusion (*māyā*, trick, piece of jugglery), consisting of the (three) qualities, hard to overcome. Those who devote themselves solely to Me escape this illusion." [105] "Fool-

[101] 13.30-33.
[102] 13.2.
[103] 8.20-22.
[104] 7.4, 5.
[105] 7.13, 14.

ish men think of Me, the Unmanifest, as having become manifest. They do not know My higher nature, everlasting and supreme."[106]

The adherents of the Vedānta philosophy interpret such passages as meaning that material nature is "illusion" (*māyā*) in the sense that it does not really exist. I believe they are wrong. The Gītā only means that the Soul—universal Soul or God as well as individual soul—is utterly distinct from material nature or body; the "illusion" consists in the apparent blending of the two. The wise man should realize the distinction; but this does not imply the non-existence of either. In my opinion the word *māyā* did not acquire its Vedāntic sense of "world-mirage" until long after the Gītā's time. The reality of material nature is clearly indicated in many passages in the Gītā. Thus it accepts the doctrine of evolution and devolution of all nature at the beginning and end of successive world-eons, a theory which is familiar in Hindu cosmogonic speculations, and makes God the "overseer" of the process, and *His* material nature the world-stuff out of which all material creatures evolve and into which they devolve. "All beings go to My material nature at the end of an eon, and again at the beginning of (the next) eon I send them forth again. Resorting to My material nature, I send forth again and again this whole number of beings, involuntarily (that is, by a natural law, not by special interference), by the power of (My) material nature. . . . With Me as overseer, material nature creates the world of moving and unmoving beings. This is the cause by which the world revolves."[107] This same process of successive creations in successive eons is alluded to elsewhere[108] and is there treated as wholly material, not even as supervised by the Supreme Soul, which however is mentioned in the following verses[109] as "higher than all that"; He does not perish when all beings perish at the end of an eon. But there is no suggestion in any of these passages that material nature is in any sense unreal.

In another very curious and interesting passage this creative activity is conceived as a sexual relation between God, as the Supreme Soul (the male principle), and the female principle of inert or receptive matter. Instead of an evolution of beings out of matter independently of the Supreme Soul, or with Him merely as "overseer" of the process, the Supreme Soul or God "plants the germ" in the womb of nature, and from this union all beings evolve. But here—most curiously—the cosmic matter is not called by the

[106] 7.24.
[107] 9.7, 8, 10.
[108] 8.18, 19.
[109] 8.20-22.

usual name of Prakriti, material nature, as we should expect[110] (although this term would be peculiarly appropriate to such a connection, since the word *prakriti* is grammatically of the feminine gender), but instead is called *Brahman,* which has neuter gender! "My womb is the great Brahman; in it I plant the germ. Thence comes the generation of all creatures. Whatsoever forms are generated in all wombs, of them Brahman is the great womb (mother); I am the father that furnishes the seed."[111] Brahman is used as an equivalent for Prakriti, material nature, in another passage also: "Whoso lays his actions upon Brahman and does his acts while avoiding attachment (or interest in the results; compare Chapter VII), to him evil does not cling, as water clings not to a lotus-leaf."[112] The context shows unmistakably that Brahman here can only mean "material nature," the "non-soul," which is, as we have already seen, solely responsible for all actions. In these passages a strange fate has overtaken the Upanishadic Brahman. Originally the Soul of the universe, it has been so far degraded as to be definitely deprived of all spirituality, and identified with the inert cosmic Matter, which is precisely all that is *not* Soul. No more significant indication could be found of the Gītā's personal theism. For nothing could be clearer than the reason for this dethronement of the Brahman. It was impersonal; and so, logically, it must either make way for, or be absorbed by, the personal God of the Gītā. Of these two alternatives, the Gītā, with the catholicity of the true mystic, chooses both, and neither. As we have seen in this chapter, Brahman (1) is absorbed into God, who assumes all its characteristics; (2) is differentiated from God and placed in some sort of subordinate position to Him, or made a lower manifestation of Him; and (3) still at times retains its ancient prestige as the Absolute, the One-in-All. All these positions appear side by side in the Gītā. Often its references to the Brahman are so vague as to leave us in doubt as to just how the author was thinking of it for the moment.[113]

[110] And, be it noted, as later speculations call it; for this same sexual figure is used in later philosophy.

[111] 14.3, 4.

[112] 5.10.

[113] There is no clear indication that the Gītā knew the concept of the Trimūrti, the supreme triad consisting of Brahmā (as a masculine deity, the Creator-God), Vishnu, and Shiva, which is familiar in later Hinduism. Only once does the word Brahman in the Gītā have masculine gender unmistakably; in some of its occurrences the forms are ambiguous and could be either masculine or neuter, but when unambiguous it is always neuter except in a single instance. In that one occurrence the god Brahmā is mentioned merely as one of the numerous beings that appear mystically manifested in the vision of the Deity's supreme form as revealed to Arjuna, in the eleventh chapter.

The whole material universe is, then, in some sense God's manifest form or material nature. But of far greater practical importance, for the development of the religion taught by the Gītā, is this further fact, that God, by the exercise of his *māyā* or "mysterious power," can and does take on empiric, personal existence as an individual being in the world of beings. "Though I am unborn and everlasting in nature, though I am the Lord of Beings, I enter into my own material nature and take on (empiric) being, by my own mysterious power." [114] This is of course a cardinal doctrine of the Gītā. Krishna, the principal speaker in the dialog, is himself such an incarnation of the Deity. He is not the only one; God appears upon earth again and again, to accomplish His purposes. And His purposes are expressed in the following famous verses: "For whenever religion languishes, and irreligion shows its head, then I create Myself. To save the righteous, to destroy the wicked, to establish religion, I come into being from age to age." [115] God condescends to become man Himself, for the benefit of mankind. This is the beginning of the famous system of *avatārs* or incarnations of God, which became so characteristic of later Vishnuism and a prime source of its strength. No Christian community needs to be told how such a doctrine of a loving God who is born upon earth to save the world can conquer the hearts of men.

Of course, God appears in such an incarnation not in His true, supernal form. That form is not only invisible to the eye of man, or even of the (popular) "gods," but also unknowable to their minds. "I know all beings that have been, that are, and that shall be; but no one knows Me." [116] "The companies of the gods know not My origin, nor the great seers (*rishis*); for I am the origin of the gods and the great seers altogether." [117] None but God Himself knows Himself, says Arjuna: "All this I hold to be true, that Thou tellest me; for neither gods nor demons know Thy manifestation, O Blessed One. Thou Thyself alone knowest Thyself by Thyself, O Supreme Spirit, Animator of Creatures, Lord of Creatures, God of Gods, Lord of the World." [118] But as a special act of grace, granted to the few whom God elects, and who serve Him with pure devotion, He may reveal His Supreme form. This He does to Arjuna, in the famous eleventh chapter of the Gītā, the climax of the poem—after

[114] 4.6.
[115] 4.7, 8.
[116] 7.26.
[117] 10.2.
[118] 10.14, 15.

first giving him a supernatural power of sight, since his natural eye could not behold the marvel.[119] The mystic vision is revealed by a pure act of God's grace. No amount of pious rites and performances can win it; it is granted only to the chosen of God, and, we are told, to Arjuna first of all mankind. "I in My grace have shown thee, Arjuna, this supreme form of Mine, by My own mysterious power; this majestic, universal, infinite, primeval form, which has not been seen before by any other than thee. Not by Vedic sacrifices and study, nor by almsgiving or rites or severe penance, can I be seen in this form by any other than thee in the world of men." [120] As to what Arjuna saw—of course, words fail utterly to describe it. It is the mystic's direct vision of God. The greater part of the eleventh chapter of the Gītā is devoted to the confessedly vain attempt to describe this indescribable. The ecstatic language of the description is hard to transfer to another tongue. Even in externals the passage differs from its surroundings; instead of the sober meter of most of the poem, it breaks forth into more elaborate lyric measures, which Sir Edwin Arnold imitates in his English version. The vision is described as "made up of all marvels." [121] "If the light of a thousand suns should suddenly burst forth in the sky, such would be His glory." [122] "Arjuna beheld the whole world there united, and yet infinitely divided, in the form of the God of Gods." [123] Therein were contained all creatures, the gods (Brahmā[124] and the rest), all the seers, the supernatural race of serpents, and all other beings;[125] there was neither beginning nor middle nor end to His form;[126] the sun and moon are His eyes, His face is flaming fire, He illumines the whole world with His radiance.[127] And so on. We recognize the type of ecstacy which so many mystics of all times and lands have told of, and which, they all agree, can only be realized at first hand, not described in terms comprehensible to another unless the other be a brother-mystic who has himself enjoyed the experience.

[119] 11.8.
[120] 11.47, 48.
[121] 11.11.
[122] 11.12.
[123] 11.13.
[124] Here occurs the only unmistakable reference to the masculine God Brahmā that is found in the Gītā.
[125] 11.15.
[126] 11.16.
[127] 11.19.

CHAPTER VII

Action and Rebirth

THE metaphysical views set forth in the last two chapters are to be understood as based upon or joined with the structure of general Hinduism which was briefly explained in my third chapter. It never occurred to the author of the Gītā to question the doctrines of pessimism, rebirth under the control of karma or "action," and salvation through ultimate release from that round of rebirths. To him they are not so much points to be proved as underlying principles, which are axiomatic in quality. In emphasizing the immortality of the soul he compares the successive lives of an individual to successive states (childhood, maturity, old age) in one life, or to changes of garments: "As in this body childhood, young manhood, and old age come to the Embodied (Soul), so It proceeds to other bodies. The wise man is not confused in this." [128] "As, laying aside worn-out garments, a man takes on other, new ones, so laying aside worn-out bodies the Embodied (Soul) enters into other, new ones." [129] These existences are, of course, all bodily ones; and that means that they are subject to all the ills that afflict the body. For if, as we have seen, the Soul is in reality independent of the body, it is only the enlightened soul which succeeds in realizing this independence, in perceiving that what affects the body does not affect him. As long as, deluded by the material organ of self-consciousness, the "I-faculty," he imagines that *he* acts and suffers, so long he is enthralled, enchained in the round of existences. It is often stated, and always implied, that this chain is an evil,—that all bodily existence entails misery. Rebirth is called "the home (or source) of misery." [130] What results in its prolongation is therefore evil; what leads to release from it is or should be the chief aim of man.

[128] 2.13.
[129] 2.22.
[130] 8.15.

He who has obtained this release goes to the perfect state, *nirvāna.*[131]

When it comes to the details of the theory of rebirth and release from it, the Hindu systems are less unanimous, in spite of certain family resemblances. Common to all of them is the doctrine of "karma" or "action, deed," according to which, generally speaking, any action done must have its result, good or bad according to its moral quality, for the doer.[132] It follows from this that in order to get rid of the chain of reincarnation, one must somehow or other be released or excused from the normally inevitable consequences of his actions—even good ones. Otherwise, *any* actions performed must have their fruit in continued existence.

The Gītā itself tells us that, as a consequence of such reasoning, "some wise men say that (all) action is to be abandoned as evil."[133] Such people choose the path of world-renouncing asceticism which has always had such an appeal to the Hindu mind. In order to escape the effects of action, namely continued existence, they propose simply not to act—or to come as near to that ideal as possible. The ascetic life is advocated not only because it approximates a state of inaction and so tends directly to obliterate "karma," but also because withdrawal from the world is a kind of insurance against being entangled in worldly desires, which lead man astray from his true goal, emancipation. There are passages in the Gītā itself which recommend ascetic methods, such as carefully regulating the breath, fixing the eyes on a spot between the eyebrows, avoiding the "external contacts" of the senses with the objects of sense, holding in check the senses, the organ of thought, and the will, and so devoting oneself solely to emancipation.[134] Even more explicitly and in greater detail another passage describes the ascetic practices of the "disciplined man." "The disciplined man should ever discipline himself, living alone in a secret place. . . . Arranging for himself in a clean place a firm seat that is neither too high nor too low, and that is covered with a cloth or a skin or *kusha*-grass, there he should concentrate his mind, restraining the activities of his thoughts and his senses, and taking his place upon the seat should practise discipline unto self-purification. Holding his body, head, and neck even and motionless, he should steadfastly gaze at the tip of his nose and not look to one side or another. Abiding in the vow of chastity,

[131] On which see above, page 22f.

[132] We shall presently speak of the extent to which this principle is restricted in the teachings of the Gītā.

[133] 18.3.

[134] 5.27, 28.

his soul at peace and free from fear, restraining his mind, his thoughts fixed on Me (God), the disciplined man should sit absorbed in Me."[135]

These are not the only passages in which the Gītā uses expressions which suggest a more or less ascetic point of view. Yet such passages are decidedly rare in comparison with those which take the diametrically opposite position that one need not, indeed should not, renounce the world to live the life of a hermit, nor seek to refrain from actions. In general, the Gītā is opposed to asceticism or to renunciation of action as such. I suspect that this has been in large part responsible for its great influence. Although the ascetic life has always appealed to more people in India, perhaps, than in any other land, still it has never been adopted in practice by more than a small minority. This is inevitable, in the nature of things. Asceticism is too violently opposed to natural human tendencies. The Gītā provides a religious justification for continuing an approximately normal human life. Therein lies its strength. It does not ask the impossible; and yet it furnishes religious inspiration. It holds out the hope of salvation on terms which are not out of the reach of the great mass of mankind. And it provides for its scheme of salvation a philosophic background, based on commonly accepted Hindu ideas.

As far as concerns the doctrine of "karma" or action as a cause of continued existence, the Gītā meets it in a very simple and convincing, and yet extremely clever, way. It reminds us that back of action lies *desire* or *passion* (either positive or negative, that is "love" or "hate"). It is passion that leads to actions, as we are told already in the Upanishads (see page 21), and still more emphatically in Buddhism and other classical Hindu systems. It is this that makes men interested in the results of actions. Now, the Gītā maintains that since desire or passion is more fundamental than action, it is desire, rather than action, which is man's enemy, and against which the preacher of religion must contend.[136] This not only seems very reasonable in itself, but it is quite in keeping with the general trend of higher Hindu thought.

But the Gītā is much more clear-cut and definite than most Hindu systems in deducing from this proposition the inference that there is no binding power in action *in itself*. If a man acts unselfishly, without interest in the result, the action has no effect on his fate;

[135] 6.10-14.
[136] 3.34, 37.

it leaves him free. "The wise call him intelligent all whose undertakings are free from desire and purpose, whose actions are consumed in the fire of knowledge. Abandoning attachment to the fruits of action, ever content, independent, he performs (in effect) no act whatsoever even when he sets out to act. Indifferent, with controlled thoughts and soul, abandoning all possessions, and performing only acts of the body (not acting with the mind; that is, not feeling interest in his actions), he does not incur sin. Content with what comes to him by chance, superior to the "pairs" (of opposites, as pain and pleasure, heat and cold, and the like), unselfish, indifferent to success or failure, even when he acts he is not bound. Without attachment, free, his mind fixed in knowledge, acting only as a religious duty, all his acts are destroyed (that is, have no binding effect)." [137] Therefore one should act without interest in the result of the action, without "desire or hate." *Indifference* is the great desideratum. It is the same as inaction in effect. It guarantees freedom from the binding effect of "karma." "Whoso neither loathes nor desires is to be regarded as having permanently abandoned (action). For he who is free from the 'pairs' (of opposites) is easily freed from the bondage (of existence)." [138] "He should not be delighted at attaining pleasure, nor should he be distressed at attaining pain." [139] He should "hold alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat." [140]

As I have said, the Gītā goes so far as definitely to oppose the quietistic life. It advises participation in action, in the affairs of life, though always with an unselfish spirit. "On action alone let thy aim be fixed, never on its fruits. Be not influenced by the fruits of action; but cleave not to inaction." [141] "Therefore perform ever disinterestedly acts that should be performed. For in performing actions disinterestedly a man reaches the highest goal." [142] "Whoso performs actions that should be performed, without interest in the fruits of action, he is the ascetic, he the disciplined man, and not he who (merely) builds no (sacrificial?) fires and performs no (religious?) acts." [143] It even goes so far as to hint at insincerity on the part of some renouncers of action, intimating that their thoughts

[137] 4.19-23.
[138] 5.3.
[139] 5.20.
[140] 2.38.
[141] 2.47.
[142] 3.19.
[143] 6.1. These expressions are somewhat ambiguous but seem to refer to ascetics who renounced the formal rites of established religion. On the attitude of the Gītā towards established religion see my tenth chapter.

may be more worldly than their actions; although perhaps all that is intended is to emphasize in the strongest possible way the importance of the mental attitude, rather than of the physical act: "Whoso restrains his organs of action and sits pondering on the objects of sense with his mind,—his soul is deluded; he is called a hypocrite. But whoso restrains his sense-organs with his mind, and with his organs of action engages in discipline-of-action[144] (disciplined action), without self-interest,—he is superior." [145] Harsh penance or self-torture, as practised by some extreme sects of Hindu ascetics, is especially reprobated as doing violence to God, who is within man's person.[146] The true ascetic, according to the Gītā, is he who "renounces" not actions, but selfish interest in actions: "Renunciation of actions due to desires is what the sages hold to be (true) renunciation. Abandonment of the fruits of all actions the wise call (true) abandonment." [147] Moreover, the ascetic position is an impossible one, since *complete* cessation of action is out of the question; he who lives *must* act more or less.[148] God Himself acts, though of course unselfishly; and of course He cannot be bound by action.[149] Without His action the world would not run; He keeps the universe going and thus sets an example of unselfish action to mankind, and the noble man should follow this example, thus himself setting an example for the common herd.[150] Action is inevitable because it is material nature that acts, through the power of past actions which compel future actions as their result; to seek to oppose the irresistible power of nature is folly.[151] "Not by not undertaking actions does a man attain to freedom from action, and not by mere withdrawal (ascetic renunciation) does he attain perfection. For there is no one whatsoever that remains even a single moment without performing actions. For every man is forced to perform actions willy-nilly, by the qualities (the three *gunas*) that spring from material nature." [152]

But granting that man should perform acts, and should not try to remain inactive, the question still remains, what kind of acts should he perform? Of course, whatever he does should be done in an unselfish spirit, without hope of reward or fear of suffering;

[144] We shall have more to say of "discipline" in Chapter VIII.
[145] 3.6, 7.
[146] 17.6.
[147] 18.2.
[148] 3.8; 18.11.
[149] 3.20-25, especially 22; 4.14; 9.9.
[150] 3.20ff.
[151] 18.60; 3.33.
[152] 3.4, 5.

but this is not a sufficiently explicit guide in choosing between the manifold possibilities of conduct that lie open to man. The Gītā tells us that "perfect action is called that which is *enjoined by duty*, free from attachment, performed without desire or repulsion, by one who does not seek the fruits thereof."[153] "Duty" perhaps means religious duty here; this seems supported by some other passages: "Mankind is bound by action, with the exception of action whose object is *religious duty*;[154] perform actions for that object, abandoning interest (in the results)."[155] Religious, charitable, and penitential acts are not binding but "purifying," and should be performed.[156] In other passages, however, "duty" clearly includes acts which cannot possibly, by any stretch, be included in this category. Thus the "duty" of a kshatriya, a member of the warrior caste, is to fight.[157] This is in keeping with a familiar traditional theory among the Hindus, according to which men have different natural duties according to the caste or station in life in which they are born. The performance of religious rites is the natural duty of brahmans; fighting (also giving of alms, protection of the people, and so forth) is that of warriors or nobles; commerce and husbandry of the vaishya caste; service, of the shūdra caste, which theoretically consists of serfs. The Gītā accepts this theory, and even devotes several stanzas[158] to a definite statement of it, naive and primitive as it seems to us.[159] It says that a man should perform his own native duty, that is, the duty which comes to him by birth, from the caste or station to which he belongs, "to which it has pleased God to call him," "even though this duty be imperfect," rather than attempt a duty that pertains to another social group.[160] Again, with a different turn, man is told to do the things that are commanded of God, throwing the responsibility on Him, and not seeking to question His wisdom. By so doing, man is freed from the bondage of "karma."[161] It is sinful pride to refuse to obey God's commands, thinking that

[153] 18.23.

[154] The word here used means literally "sacrifice"; but it is used in the Gītā in a way which seems to include by extension any kind of duty enjoined by religion.

[155] 3.9; cf. 4.23, "if one acts for religious duty, all his acts are wiped out."

[156] 18.3, 5, 6.

[157] 2.31.

[158] 18.41-44.

[159] As naive and primitive, let us say, as the theory that it is the natural duty of one man to work twelve hours in a steel-mill, and that of another to spend five or six hours in a New York office managing the financial affairs of that mill and others.

[160] 3.35; 18.45-48.

[161] 3.30-32.

you know better than God.[162] We may see in these various discussions of "duty," as either innate in the social order or founded on divine commands, groping attempts to formulate definite answers to the very natural question, what concrete acts does "duty" require of man? But it is hardly possible to conceal the unsatisfactory nature of the Gītā's conclusions on this point. The writer, at least, cannot blame Arjuna for inquiring: "If thou holdest the attitude of mind to be more important than action, then why dost thou command me to do this savage deed, O Krishna?" [163] Why, indeed, should one fight and slay, even "unselfishly"? This eminently reasonable question is shamelessly dodged by Krishna; no real answer is given—perhaps because none can be given.[164] And more often the Gītā attempts no concrete definition of duty, but contents itself with saying that man should do his duty simply because it *is* his duty, and with perfect indifference to the results—reminding us of Kant's categorical imperative.

We must, however, refer to another attempt to define duty which the Gītā repeatedly presents, and which not only furnishes a very high ethical standard, but is a logical deduction from the best Hindu metaphysics. If God is in all beings, if the soul or real self of all beings is One, it follows that "The wise look alike upon a learned and cultivated brahman, a (sacred) cow, an elephant, a dog, and a hunter." [165] All beings are one in God; by true knowledge "thou shalt see all beings without exception in thyself, and in Me." [166] "He whose soul is devoted to discipline, seeing the same in all things, perceives himself in all beings, and all beings in himself," [167] and "Me (God) in all and all in Me." [168] Accordingly one should behave

[162] 18.58, 59.
[163] 3.1.
[164] I have tried to put the best possible light on the Gītā's teachings in this regard, and have ignored for this purpose certain verses in which the "duty" to fight is enjoined upon Arjuna on still lower grounds, as on the ground that he will be suspected of cowardice if he withdraws from the battle, and so will be despised of men (2.34ff.; contrast 14.24, which says one must be indifferent to praise and blame), or even on the ground that if he is slain he will gain heaven (alluding to the popular Hindu belief in a sort of Valhalla for warriors slain in battle), while if he conquers he will enjoy rule over earth (2.37). These intrusions of popular ideas, while certainly unworthy of the philosophic standard of most of the Gītā, need not be considered interpolations. They simply illustrate the fact to which I have often alluded, that the Gītā is not a logical or systematic philosophical treatise, but a poem, containing many inconsistencies in ethical as well as metaphysical notions.
[165] 5.18. Dogs are very unclean animals in India; and hunters are among the lowest and most despised of social groups.
[166] 4.35.
[167] 6.29.
[168] 6.30.

in the same way towards friend and foe, kinsman and stranger, good men and bad;[169] namely, towards all as one would towards oneself. "Whoso looks upon all beings in the same way as upon himself, and sees likeness in all, whether it be pleasure or pain, he is called the supreme *yogin* (disciplined man)."[170] Those who are completely pervaded by the consciousness of this truth, who feel that all beings are the same as themselves, that all as well as themselves are one with God, are freed from the effects of action and from rebirth; for they, of course, will not "injure themselves (in others) by themselves";[171] they "identify their own souls with the souls of all creatures, and even when they act are not affected ('stained') thereby."[172] "Even in this life, rebirth is overcome by those whose minds are fixed in the consciousness-of-sameness. For Brahman is faultless and alike (the same, in all creatures). Therefore such men are fixed in Brahman."[173] "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" —because thy neighbor *is* thyself; God is in both thee and thy neighbor, and both are in God. He who acts in this spirit need not fear that his acts will bind him to further existence.[174]

[169] 6.9.
[170] 6.32.
[171] 13.28.
[172] 5.7.
[173] 5.19.
[174] Compare Chapter XI.

CHAPTER VIII

The Way of Knowledge and the Way of Disciplined Activity

THE dispute between those who held that all actions were binding, that is, involved man in continued existence, and those who maintained that acts performed with "indifference" to the results had no such effect, appears to have been only one aspect of a broader difference of opinion. So far we have spoken of what we have called the ascetic position as if it were a purely negative doctrine, teaching merely that man shall be saved by abstention from actions. But we learn from the Gītā that the school of thought against which its arguments on this subject are chiefly directed had a much more important positive theory of salvation, which is strictly in accord with the most fundamental principles of Hindu speculation from the Upanishads (and even before them) onward, and to which the Gītā itself feels forced to admit a considerable validity. This positive theory was no other than the "way of knowledge" which we met in Upanishadic thought, and which we traced back to its origins in the earliest Vedic speculations; the theory that by perfect knowledge man can control his destiny; that "the truth shall make" him "free."

So ingrained in Hindu thought is this belief in the power of supreme esoteric knowledge that probably no Hindu system would venture to deny it. The Gītā certainly does not. In many verses it recognizes it as explicitly as possible. "Even if thou shouldst be the worst of all sinners, merely by the boat of knowledge thou shalt cross over all (the 'sea' of) evil."[175] "As a kindled fire burns firewood to ashes, so the fire of knowledge burns all deeds to ashes,"[176] that is, frees man from rebirth, the effect of deeds. Doubt, the opposite of knowledge, is fatal; the ignorant doubter cannot hope for bliss.[177] Man must "cut doubt with the sword of knowledge."[178]

[175] 4.36.
[176] 4.37.
[177] 4.40.
[178] 4.41, 42.

Knowledge is better than mere ritual religion: "Better than material sacrifice is the sacrifice (that consists) of knowledge. All action (karma) without exception is completely ended in knowledge."[179] What knowledge? The knowledge of the supreme religious truth which each system professes to teach. Thus in the Gītā it is most often knowledge of God. Whosoever knows the mystic truth of God's nature is freed from rebirth and goes to God.[180] But elsewhere it is, for instance, the knowledge of the absolute separateness of soul and body, the independence of the soul from the body and all its acts and qualities, which brings release from rebirth.[181] In fact, the Gītā, like the Upanishads, tends to promise complete emancipation to one who "knows" any particularly profound religious or philosophic truth which it sets forth. This seems to have been characteristic of Hindu systems generally, at least in their early stages.

While different thinkers differed in their formulations of the supreme truth, by knowing which man should gain salvation, it appears that another and perhaps a more important difference, from the practical standpoint, was in their doctrines of method, or in the varying degrees of emphasis laid on various possible methods, for attaining enlightenment. The Gītā refers several times to such differences of method. In one passage it tells us that "some by *meditation* come to behold the Self (Soul, *ātman*) by themselves (or, by Itself); others by the Sānkhya discipline, and others by the discipline of Action. But others, while not having this knowledge, hear it from others and devote themselves to it; even they too cross over death, by devoting themselves to what is revealed."[182] According to this, true knowledge—here spoken of as knowledge of the *ātman*, the Self or Soul (the context indicates that the author is thinking of the individual soul, as distinguished from matter, rather than of the universal soul)—may be gained in various ways: first, by inner meditation; then, by what is called the Sānkhya discipline, and by the "discipline of action"; and fourthly, by instruction from others, if one cannot attain to it by himself. All these methods are possible; all lead to salvation, to "crossing over death," which implies also escape from rebirth, since rebirth leads to redeath.

It is necessary to consider what the author means by the "Sānkhya discipline" and the "discipline of action." These are technical terms, which require very careful definition. The word which *I*

[179] 4.33.
[180] 4.9, 10; 7.19; 10.3; 14.1ff.
[181] 5.16, 17 (cf. the preceding verses); 14.22-25.
[182] 13.24, 25.

translate "discipline" is *yoga*. The phrase "discipline of action" renders a Sanskrit compound, *karma-yoga*. Elsewhere the word *yoga* alone is used in the sense of *karma-yoga;* that is, "discipline," when otherwise undefined, means in the Gītā frequently (and indeed usually) the "discipline of action." The word *yoga* is unfortunately a very fluid one, used in a great variety of senses; this makes it often hard to give an exact definition of its meaning in any given occurrence. It may mean simply "method, means." It also means "exertion, diligence, zeal." And especially it is used to describe a regular, disciplined course of *action* leading to a definite end; in the Gītā and works of its type, to the end of emancipation. In some contemporary works it connotes a system of ascetic practices culminating in a sort of self-hypnosis, conceived as leading to emancipation, or to some supernatural attainment. It always denotes, in works of the time of the Gītā, a *practical* method, as distinguished from an *intellectual* method. But in the Gītā its meaning is narrowed down. Here it means the method of salvation which is characterized by participation in normal, worldly action (hence the fuller expression *karma-yoga*, which is synonymous with *yoga* alone in this sense) without interest in the fruits of action. Action characterized by indifference is the central principle. "Yoga is defined as Indifference," says one verse.[183] But it is always an indifference *in action*. The word *yoga* definitely implies *activity*, as it is used in this connection in the Gītā, where it is constantly colored by more or less subconscious association with the other meaning of the word, "energetic performance, exertion." It is then opposed to the system or "rule" or "discipline" (the same word *yoga* is also used, confusingly) of the Sānkhya, which is elsewhere called the *jnāna-yoga* or "discipline of *knowledge*": "In this world a two-fold foundation (of religion) has been expounded by Me of old; by the discipline (or, method) of knowledge of the followers of Sānkhya, and by the discipline (or, method) of action of the followers of Yoga."[184]

The word *sānkhya* seems to mean "based on calculation"; that is, "philosophical, reflective, speculative method."[185] The adherents of this method believed in knowledge as the supreme and exclusive means of salvation, and in particular, according to the Gītā, they favored renunciation of all "works," of all activities. In the verses

[183] 2.48.

[184] 3.3.

[185] Another theory is that it means "dealing with numbers," because the (later) system called by this name was characterized by many enumerated categories. Though this interpretation is accepted by many distinguished scholars, it seems to me erroneous.

just following the one last quoted,[186] the Gītā's author argues against the policy of ascetic renunciation, clearly indicating that he is opposing the doctrine of the Sānkhya. In another passage *sannyāsa,* a regular term for ascetic renunciation, is contrasted with *karma-yoga,* "discipline of action," and in the next verse but one the same contrast is expressed by the terms *sānkhya* and *yoga.*[187] Further light as to the doctrines of the "Sānkhya" school is furnished by a passage in which a dissertation on the complete distinction between the soul and the body (see Chapter V) is followed by this verse: "This (preceding) is the point of view set forth in the Sānkhya; but hear now this (point of view set forth) in the Yoga."[188] The "knowledge" which the Sānkhya taught, therefore, was or included the dualistic doctrine (familiarly accepted in the Gītā) that soul and body are two eternally separate entities.[189]

We have seen that many passages in the Gītā fully recognize the value of knowledge as a means of salvation. We have also found in various connections that the Gītā is very catholic and tolerant; that it is much inclined to admit validity to different points of view. We need not, therefore, be surprised to learn that in several places it definitely recognizes both the Sānkhya and the Yoga methods as effective. It even asserts that they are really one at bottom; which is simply another way of saying the same thing, that they both lead to salvation. "Fools say that Sānkhya and Yoga are different, not the wise. One who devotes himself only to one of these two obtains completely the benefits of both. The station that is obtained by the followers of Sānkhya is also reached by the followers of Yoga. Whoso looks upon Sānkhya and Yoga as one has true vision."[190]

[186] 3.4ff.

[187] 5.2, 4.

[188] 2.39. The preceding passage referred to is the discussion summed up in 2.30; there intervene a number of verses which are parenthetical and may possibly be a later interpolation, dealing with wholly unrelated matters. Practically all the rest of the Chapter (vss. 47-72) is devoted to explaining the doctrine of *yoga,* namely, indifference in action (cf. especially 2.47, 48).

[189] I have felt it necessary to go into this matter somewhat technically because of the confusingly various ways in which these terms are used, and because of the further confusing fact that these same terms, Sānkhya and Yoga, are later applied to two systems of philosophy which have found many adherents in India but which I think did not exist in codified forms at the time of the Gītā. It seems to me that the later use of these two names is wholly different from their use in the time of the Gītā, and that we can understand the Gītā's meaning better if we ignore that later usage. For instance, the later Sānkhya system is atheistic; it denies the existence of any World-soul or God. But there is no suggestion of such a view in the "Sānkhya" of the time of the Gītā (in my opinion; the contrary has been maintained, but I think wrongly). The later use of the term "Yoga" developes out of another sort of "practical activity" than that indicated by the Gītā as "Yoga."

[190] 5.4, 5.

"Abandonment (of action; that is, the "way of knowledge" or the Sānkhya way) and discipline of action (*karma-yoga;* that is, the Yoga way) both bring the highest good." [191]

Yet the same verse of which I have just quoted a part goes on to say: "But of these two, discipline of action (*karma-yoga*) is better than abandonment of action (*karma-sannyāsa*)." And the reason, which is given a few verses later, is very interesting. "Abandonment, however, without discipline (*yoga*), is hard to attain. The sage who is devoted to discipline quickly (easily) goes to Brahman." [192] Again, as above on page 49f., we find the Gītā looking for the "easy way" to salvation, trying to meet the "man-in-the-street" half-way. It allows validity to the severe, more toilsome path of pure knowledge with ascetic renunciation of all activities. But few can travel that road. The Gītā appeals to the masses; that is why it has always had so many followers. It claims that all the results which accrue to the follower of the strict intellectual method may also be obtained without withdrawing from action. Nay, it claims that even knowledge itself—the direct aim of the intellectual school —may be obtained through disciplined activity: "For there is no purifier in the world like knowledge. He who is perfected in discipline (*yoga*) in due time finds it (knowledge) in himself." [193] From this point of view we may regard Yoga, disciplined activity, as an auxiliary means, useful in gaining the knowledge that shall bring release, just as devotion to God is elsewhere regarded in the same light.[194] This supports the thesis which I set forth in Chapter III,[195] that in Hindu speculation generally knowledge is to be regarded as the primary means of salvation, and all other methods are in origin secondary helps to the gaining of knowledge, however much they may come to overshadow the original aim.

In the Gītā, then, we find that the way of disciplined activity (*yoga*) is constantly favored at the expense of the way of knowledge and inactivity (*sānkhya*), despite the statements quoted above to the effect that either one is good enough as a means of salvation. Discipline and the practiser of discipline (the *yogin* or "possessor of *yoga,*" or the *yukta,* "disciplined man") are constantly praised and exalted. "The disciplined man, renouncing the fruit of action, gains final blessedness. The undisciplined, because he acts wilfully (or,

[191] 5.2.
[192] 5.6.
[193] 4.38.
[194] See page 74f. below.
[195] Pages 23, 25, 29.

according to his lusts), being attached to the fruits of action, is bound." [196] If one practises this sort of disciplined activity even imperfectly, that is, without completely realizing it in life, still the effect of it is not lost but continues in future births, bringing man ever nearer and nearer to full attainment, until at last, by perfection in discipline, salvation is gained.[197] Disciplined activity is superior not only to the "way of knowledge" but also to asceticism and to orthodox ritual religion: "The disciplined man (*yogin*, "possessor of discipline") is superior to ascetics, and to the devotees of knowledge he is also considered superior, and to the devotees of (religious) works he is superior; therefore be disciplined, O Arjuna." [198] It is significant, however, that "love of God" is *not* subordinated to disciplined activity in this list. On the contrary, the very next verse[199] adds that "the most perfectly disciplined man (*yuktatama*) is he who worships Me." In the next chapter we shall take up the method of devotion to God.

Readers may fairly ask for a more exact definition of what is meant by this "disciplined activity," this *yoga*. The Gītā does not fail to furnish it. It is implied by what has been said in this chapter and the preceding one. It consists in doing unselfishly whatever action seems to be required in any given circumstances; taking no interest in the results of the action to the doer, but not seeking to evade responsibility by refusing to act at all. The state of *yoga* is identified with "equanimity, stability of mind." It is described especially in a long passage in the second chapter of the Gītā, of which I quote selections here:[200] "Perform actions abiding in discipline, abandoning attachment (to the results), and being indifferent to success or failure; discipline is defined as indifference. For (mere) action is far inferior to discipline of mental attitude. Seek salvation in the mental attitude; contemptible are those that act with regard for results. He who is disciplined in mind leaves behind him in this life (the effects of) good and bad deeds alike. Therefore practise discipline; discipline in actions brings welfare. For the wise men that are disciplined in mind and abandon the fruits of action are freed from the bonds of rebirth and go to perfect bliss. . . . When one abandons all the desires of the mind and finds satisfaction by himself in his Self alone, then he is said to have 'stability of mind'

[196] 5.12.
[197] 6.37-45.
[198] 6.46.
[199] 6.47.
[200] 2.48-72. The word "discipline" in my translation always renders *yoga*, and "disciplined" renders the corresponding participle *yukta*.

(equanimity; a synonym for 'discipline'). He who is not perturbed by unhappiness and is without desire for pleasure, free from passion, fear, and anger, is called a stable-minded sage. He who is always free from desire, who when he is visited by this or that pleasant or unpleasant experience neither rejoices nor repines, his mind is stabilized. . . . For even the mind of an intelligent and earnestly striving man is violently carried away by the impetuous senses. Restraining them all he should abide in discipline, devoted to Me; for he whose senses are under control has a stabilized mind. . . . The man who abandons all desires and acts without longing, without selfishness, free from self-consciousness, attains peace."

In other passages special emphasis is laid on the idea contained in the phrase "when one abandons all the desires of the mind and finds satisfaction by himself in his Self alone." What is meant is of course very different from what we mean by "selfishness." The idea is that internal joys are the only true ones; external joys, that is, those which result from the senses through external stimulants, are both transitory and illusory. "He whose soul is not attached to external contacts finds the joy that is in the Self; his soul is disciplined with the discipline of (i. e., that leads to) Brahman, and he attains eternal bliss. For the enjoyments that come from (outside) contacts contain in themselves the germs of pain; they are transitory (literally, 'they have beginning and end'); the wise man finds no pleasure in them. He who even in this life, before being freed from the body, can overcome the disturbances that spring from desire and anger, he is disciplined, he is blessed. Whoso finds his joy, his delight, and his illumination *within,* he, the disciplined, becomes Brahman, and goes to the *nirvāna* that is Brahman." [201] "In which (state of *yoga,* discipline) the thoughts are quieted, held in check by the practice of discipline, and in which, contemplating the Self by the Self, one finds satisfaction in the Self; in which he experiences that infinite bliss which is perceptible (only) to the consciousness and is beyond the senses, and in which firmly established he cannot be moved from the truth; having gained which he realizes that there is no greater gain than it; abiding in which he is not moved by any sorrow, however great; he shall know this remover of all contacts with sorrow that is known as Yoga. This Yoga (discipline) should be practised with determination, with undistracted thought."'[202] "But the man who finds his delight only in the Self, and his contentment

[201] 5.21-24.
[202] 6.20-23.

and satisfaction only in the Self, for him there is (in effect) no action to be done. He can have no interest whatever in action nor yet in inaction in this world, nor has he any dependence of interests in all beings (that is, he cannot be affected for either better or worse by anything from outside of himself)." [203]

Of particular interest is one verse which speaks of *moderation* in all things as a characteristic of the "disciplined" follower of *yoga:* "There is no discipline in him who eats too much, nor yet in him who fasts completely; neither in him who indulges in too much sleep, nor yet in him who sleeps not at all." [204] This very pointedly emphasizes the opposition of the policy of "discipline" to that of asceticism, which was characterized by long-continued fasts, sometimes to the point of self-starvation, and by other extreme practices. This is one of the points of contact between the Gītā and Buddhism, for Buddhism too makes much of the doctrine of the "golden mean," opposing the extreme of self-torture as well as the extreme of worldliness.[205]

In closing this chapter I wish to reaffirm the fact that, in spite of occasional disparagements of the "way of knowledge," the Gītā's doctrine of disciplined activity really has an intellectual basis. The reason for acting with indifference is that actions cannot really affect the soul for good or ill; they concern matter exclusively. He who *knows* this will be steadfast in *yoga,* in indifference. This is brought out with admirable clarity in the last passage which I shall quote in describing the disciplined man: "As to both illumination and activity and delusion,[206] he neither loathes them when they appear nor longs for them when they have vanished (that is, he is indifferent to all material things). Taking part (in actions) as a disinterested participant, he is not perturbed by the (three) qualities (of matter); he stands firm and unmoved in the *knowledge* that it is only the qualities that are active. He is indifferent to pain and pleasure, and self-contained; clods of earth, stones, and gold are all one to him, pleasant and unpleasant things alike; he is steadfast, and careless of praise or blame. Unmoved by honor or dishonor, alike to friend and foe, renouncing all enterprises, he is declared to have transcended the

[203] 3.17, 18.

[204] 6.16.

[205] Similar expressions occur, to be sure, in late texts of the (later, systematic) "yoga" philosophy; and this point has been taken as an indication of interrelationship between the latter and Buddhism. See Oldenberg, *Upanishaden und Buddhismus,* p. 327.

[206] These are the characteristic marks of the three "qualities" of material nature, *sattva, rajas,* and *tamas;* see page 39.

qualities (of matter)."[207] In so far as the Gītā quarrels with what it calls the Sānkhya school, it is really not so much on the question of the power of knowledge, nor on the definition of what true knowledge is. It is rather because of the policy of complete abstention from actions which the Gītā attributes to the followers of Sānkhya. This is directly opposed to the doctrine of activity with indifference, which the Gītā usually preaches with all possible force—although, as we saw in the last chapter, it contains passages which are inconsistent even with this.

[207] 14.22-25.

CHAPTER IX

The Way of Devotion to God

IT HAS required something like a *tour de force* to reserve for this place a treatment of the relation of God to human salvation in the teachings of the Gītā. For in a sense it has involved temporarily ignoring the most cardinal doctrine of the poem. Yet the poem itself affords a precedent for approximately such an arrangement. The Gītā does not begin with this subject; and references to it in the early chapters are few and scattering. In the middle chapters of the work it gradually becomes more prominent, until it finally occupies the center of the stage, with the climax in the eleventh chapter, in which the mystic vision of God's supernal form is revealed to Arjuna.[208] After this, somewhat anti-climactically, the Gītā gradually drops into other themes again, to return to the theme of salvation through God towards the end of its final, summary chapter (the eighteenth).

But in spite of our best efforts it has proved impossible to avoid some anticipation of this theme in the preceding chapters. In fact, with all the mixture of discordant theories which the Gītā contains, it is nevertheless so prevalently and devoutly theistic that its theism colors many of its expressions on other themes. So the various schemes of salvation, largely inherited from Upanishadic speculation, are reinterpreted in the Gītā in terms of its personal theism. The Upanishads taught that "knowledge" of the First Principle of the universe would lead to salvation. But the First Principle of the universe is God, declares the Gītā. It follows that knowledge of God is what brings salvation.[209] Freedom from rebirth comes from attainment—not of an impersonal First Principle, but—of God.[210]

[208] Page 54f.
[209] Page 65.
[210] 8.15, 16, etc.

Knowledge, however, whether of Brahman or of a personal God, is "hard to attain," as we have seen.[211] The difficulties of the intellectual method are emphasized in many places in the Gītā. Easier for the most of mankind is a more emotional scheme of salvation. This is what the Gītā furnishes by its famous doctrine of *bhakti*, "devotion" or "love of God." Though not entirely unknown to the Upanishads,[212] it is virtually a new note in Hindu religious speculation. No doubt it originated in more popular forms of religion, which have left no written records. In the nature of things it could hardly be found, or at least could hardly be prominent, except in theistic religions. For "devotion" or "love" can hardly be felt except for a divine *personality*. That is why it is practically absent from the older forms of Hindu religion which are known to us.[213] Their divine principles were too impersonal. But we have good reason to believe that side by side with these abstract speculations there had long existed popular cults which worshipped various local gods and heroes; the Krishna of the Bhagavad Gītā evidently originated as such a local deity. And it may fairly be taken for granted that in many or most of these cults the idea of devoted love of the god on the part of his worshippers, and perhaps vice versa, had played a considerable role.[214]

We have already seen that the Gītā's religion is a compromise between the speculation of the intellectuals and the emotionalism of popular religion. So the notion of *bhakti*, devotion, enters into its scheme of salvation by a side door, without at first displacing the old intellectual theory of salvation by knowledge. At least it is rationalized in this way. It is represented that by devoted love of God one can attain knowledge (of God), and so *indirectly* the salvation which comes through this knowledge: "By devotion one comes

[211] "Among thousands of men perhaps one strives for perfection. Even of those who strive and perfect themselves, rarely does one know Me in very truth." (7.3.) "Hard to find is the noble man who knows that Vāsudeva (a name for Krishna=God) is all." (7.19.) But: "Whoso always reveres Me with constantly fixed mind, for him I am easy to attain." (8.14.)

[212] See page 26f.

[213] In the polytheism of the Rig Veda we do, indeed, find some traces of a relationship of love and trust between man and his gods, particularly as concerns the god Agni, the divine fire, who is found in every man's house and is "the friend of man." There is a wide gap, however, both in time and in spirit, between this and the "devotion" of the Bhagavad Gītā.

[214] The striking correspondence in externals between the Gītā's *bhakti* and the Christian love of God led some, in earlier days, to believe that the Gītā had borrowed the notion from Christianity. The correspondence is interesting, but it certainly does not justify such a theory. Undoubtedly, the two religions developed independently. The Gītā is now known to be almost certainly pre-Christian in date.

to know Me, what My measure is and what I am in very truth; then, knowing Me in very truth, he straightway enters into Me."[214a]. So after the mystic revelation of his true form to Arjuna, Krishna declares that such a revelation can come to a man through no other means than devoted love: "But by single devotion it is possible to know Me in this form, Arjuna, and to behold Me in very truth, and (so) to enter into Me."[215] Thus it is possible logically to reconcile the theory of devotion with the theory so often expressed that knowledge of God is what brings man to union with Him, that is, to salvation. Devotion to God is an auxiliary means of gaining knowledge of Him. It may be significant that one of the Upanishad passages which mention the method of "devotion" speaks of it in the same way, as a means of getting knowledge.[216]

But not for long—if ever consistently—was the way of devotion subordinated to the way of knowledge. Usually the Gītā speaks of devotion as the immediate and all-sufficient way to final union with God. "Fix thy mind and devotion on Me; worship Me and revere Me. Thou shalt come even to Me by disciplining thy soul in full devotion to Me."[217] "Fix thy mind on Me alone, let thy consciousness sink in Me, and thou shalt come to dwell even in Me hereafter; of that there is no doubt."[218] Even wicked men quickly become righteous and attain salvation through devotion to God; even low-caste men, and women (who are a low grade of creatures), may be saved in the same way; "no devotee of God is lost."[219]

This quasi-miraculous salvation through devotion is frequently represented as due to special divine intervention on behalf of the devotee. God, as it were, cancels the laws of nature for the benefit of his devoted worshippers, and brings them to salvation by divine grace. "But those who, laying all actions upon Me, filled with Me, meditate on Me and revere Me with absolutely single devotion, these I will speedily rescue out of the ocean of the round of (rebirths and) deaths, because their thoughts are fixed on Me."[220] Therefore one should "abandon all other religions" and make God his sole refuge; then "I will rescue thee from all evils; be not afraid!"[221] In another passage it is explained differently; God is represented as impartial

[214a] 18.55.
[215] 11.54.
[216] See page 26.
[217] 9.34.
[218] 12.8; similarly 8.7; 11.55.
[219] 9.30-32.
[220] 12.6,7.
[221] 18.66; cf. 9.22.

to all men, having no favorites, but still the devotee is, by reason of his devotion, united with God: "I am alike to all beings; none is either hated or loved of Me. But those who revere Me with devotion—they are in Me and I too am in them." [222]

Even "discipline" (*yoga*), of which so much was said in the last chapter as a favorite way of salvation, is granted to the devotee by God. This again seems to suggest that devotion is not the immediate way to salvation, but a help towards it, in that it assists the devotee along the way—the way being here not the way of knowledge but that of "discipline." "To those ever-disciplined ones that revere Me lovingly, I grant discipline of mind, and by that they come unto Me." [223] In the very next verse God grants the light of *knowledge* to the devotee: "Just out of kindness to them I, while remaining in My own true nature, destroy their darkness that is born of ignorance by the shining light of knowledge." [224] All this simply amounts to saying that devotion is the way *par excellence*—that it is the key-road, which controls all other roads to salvation. The passage quoted at the end of the last chapter, describing the man who is perfectly disciplined and whose discipline is founded on true knowledge, is followed by this: "And he who reveres Me with the unswerving discipline of *devotion*, surpasses these qualities (of matter) and becomes fit for the estate of Brahman (that is, for emancipation)." [225] The way of knowledge and the way of disciplined activity are allowed their place; but the way of devotion controls them. Similarly after a passage[226] which sets forth the ascetic position, there is added the recommendation that the ascetic should fix his thoughts on God; by so doing he shall attain "the peace that culminates in *nirvāna*, and that rests in Me." [227] We referred above to the significant fact that in a passage glorifying "discipline" (*yoga*), the disciplined man is declared to be superior to ascetics, to followers of the path of knowledge, and to those who adhere to the rites of orthodox religion, but not to adherents of the method of devotion to God; on the contrary, "the most perfectly disciplined man is he who devoutly reveres Me, with his soul fixed on Me." [228] In one passage, which is curiously typical of the catholic or eclectic attitude which we have repeatedly noticed as characteristic of the Gītā, we

[222] 9.29.
[223] 10.10.
[224] 10.11.
[225] 14.26.
[226] Quoted above, page 57f.
[227] 6.15.
[228] 6.47; see page 69.

are given to understand that God may be reached (and this implies complete emancipation) in several ways. First, we are commanded to sink our hearts completely in loving devotion to God. "However, if thou canst not fix thy thoughts firmly on Me, then seek to win Me by practical discipline (that is, by *yoga,* 'disciplined activity'). If incapable of practical discipline, then exert thyself in My work; by performing actions for My sake (as described in the next paragraph) thou shalt also gain perfection. But if thou art unable even to perform actions with reliance upon My rule, then act with abandonment of all fruits of action (that is, unselfishly, as set forth in Chapter VII), controlling thyself." [229] The way of devotion is the favorite one to the author of the Gītā; but he admits the validity of other ways too, if for personal reasons a man finds them preferable. Still oftener, all these various ways are more or less vaguely blended and felt as in the last analysis essentially one; but the devotional coloring is perhaps the most constant characteristic of the blend.

As indicated in the last quotation, the attitude of devotion to God has an important bearing on the question of action and its results under the doctrine of karma, discussed in my seventh chapter. Not only does duty require that one should do the commands of God,[230] but a sure way to escape any of the normal results of action, in continued rebirth, is to "do all as a gift to God" or to "resign all actions to God"; that is, to throw upon Him all responsibility for actions; if one acts only in a spirit of loving devotion to God and of trust in Him, relying upon Him to settle the matter, He will save the devotee from the effects of action; that is, from further rebirth. "Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest (in sacrifice), whatever thou givest, whatever penance thou performest, that do as a gift to Me. Thus thou shalt be freed from the bonds of action with its fruits, whether good or evil; thy soul shall be fixed in the discipline of renunciation, and thou shalt be freed and shalt attain unto Me." [231] Let a man perform his own natural duty[232] as a service to God: "A man finds perfection in worshiping Him from whom all beings spring, by whom this universe is pervaded—*by doing his own (natural) duty.*" [233] "Taking refuge in Me, though ever performing all acts, by My grace a man attains the eter-

[229] 12.9-11.
[230] 3.30-32.
[231] 9.27-28.
[232] Cf. page 61.
[233] 18.46.

nal, undying station. Casting mentally all acts upon Me, devoted to Me, cleaving to discipline of mind, keep thy thoughts ever fixed on Me." [234] "Thinking on Me, by My grace thou shalt cross over all difficulties"; refusal to do so would be a sign of pride and self-conceit, an indication that man thinks he knows more than God; such a man would perish; "material nature would ensnare" him.[235] Nor need man fear that anything done in true, loving devotion to God will be ignored by Him. God accepts the humblest offering of His devotees, taking it in the spirit in which it is meant: "If a man offers Me with devotion (*bhakti*) a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or a sip of water—that loving gift of My devotee I accept (literally, I eat)." [236]

It is especially important that one should fix his mind on God at the time of death. According to a familiar belief among the Hindus, the attitude of mind at the hour of death is especially influential in determining man's state after death.[237] The following verse of the Gītā expresses the traditionally accepted view: "Whatever condition of being one meditates on as he leaves the body at death, precisely to that condition he goes, his whole nature being infused therewith." [238] That is why to this day all pious Hindus meditate on their respective sectarian deities, and recite their sacred mantras or holy formulas, at the hour of death, hoping thereby to gain salvation. Accordingly the Gītā does not hesitate to promise this result to one who meditates on God at death: "He who at the time of his death passes out and leaves his body while meditating on Me alone, goes to My estate; of this there is no doubt." [239] "(Whosoever thinks on God) at the time of his death with unswerving mind, disciplined (*yukta*) in devotion (*bhakti*) and in the power of discipline (*yoga*) too, making his breath to pass wholly into the space between his eyebrows, he goes to that supreme, divine Person (*purusha*). . . . Pronouncing the single (sacred) syllable Om (which is) Brahman, thinking upon Me, he who (thus) leaves the body and dies goes to the highest goal." [240]

[234] 18.56, 57.
[235] 18.58, 59.
[236] 9.26.
[237] Indeed, according to the Gītā (8.23-27), the time of death is so important in determining man's future fate, that the "disciplined man" and "knower of Brahman" attains freedom from rebirth if he dies at a favorable time, but is reborn again if he dies at an unfavorable time. Favorable times are "fire, light, day, the light half of the lunar month (when the moon is waxing), the six months during which the sun moves northward." Their opposites are unfavorable.
[238] 8.6. [239] 8.5. [240] 8.10, 13.

The characteristics of the perfect devotee of God are very much like those attributed to the possessor of "discipline" as described in the last chapter. Indeed, the two are really one. The true possessor of "discipline" will be devoted to God; devotion to God involves or brings with it perfection in discipline. Perhaps the note of joy, of bliss, is more definitely present in descriptions of the devotee than of the "disciplined" man. "Those whose thoughts and lives are centered upon Me, who are ever enlightening one another and telling about Me (giving 'testimony,' as some Christian sects say), are filled with joy and contentment." [241] The true devotee is described in the following passage: "Not hostile but friendly and compassionate to all creatures, unselfish and without egotism, indifferent to pain and pleasure, patient, contented, ever disciplined, self-controlled, of firm resolution; he who is devoted to Me and has fixed his mind and consciousness upon Me, is dear to Me. From whom people do not shrink and who does not shrink from people, who is free from the excitement of joy, impatience, fear, and agitation, he is dear to Me. Indifferent, pure, wise, disinterested, imperturbable, abandoning all undertakings,—such a devotee of Mine is dear to Me. Who neither rejoices nor hates, neither grieves nor desires, who renounces pleasant and unpleasant objects, and is full of devotion, he is dear to Me. Who is the same to friend and foe, indifferent to honor and disgrace, to heat and cold, to joy and sorrow, who has abandoned all attachment, a sage to whom praise and blame are all one, content with whatsoever (his lot may be), having no fixed habitation, of steadfast mind, full of devotion, he is dear to Me. But those devotees of Mine who believe and accept this nectar of religious doctrine as I have expressed it (in the Bhagavad Gītā), they are especially dear to Me." [242]

The very heart, the quintessence, of the doctrines of the Gītā is declared by Hindu commentators to be found in this verse:[243] "He who does My work, who is devoted to Me and loves Me, who is free from attachment (to worldly things) and from enmity to all creatures, goes to Me, Son of Pāndu!"

[241] 10.9.
[242] 12.13-20.
[243] 11.55.

CHAPTER X

Attitude Towards Hindu Orthodoxy and Other Religious Beliefs

THE curious many-sidedness, tolerance, or inconsistency—whichever one may choose to call it—of the Bhagavad Gītā, which we have noted in nearly every chapter of this book, is shown nowhere more strikingly than in its attitude towards what we may call orthodox, established religion.

By this I mean the system of traditional sacrifices and observances, founded ultimately upon the Vedic cult, which became accepted by Brahmanism and were in the time of the Gītā, and have remained even to this day, theoretically incumbent upon all pious Hindus, at least of the upper castes. This system of rites implied and implies very little in the way of beliefs. It was and is, almost exclusively, a matter of formal observances. It is a matter of conformance to traditional propriety in actions; so long as one conforms outwardly, it makes little difference what he believes inwardly. It does, to be sure, imply recognition of the privileged status of the brahman caste, as the hereditary custodians of the cult, and the nominal leaders of society. No sacrifice was supposed to be valid unless a brahman was hired to perform it.

The original theory of this orthodox cult is fairly stated in the Bhagavad Gītā: "The gods, being propitiated by sacrifices, shall grant you the enjoyments you desire. He who without giving to them enjoys their gifts is nothing but a thief."[244] That is, it is a matter of commercial bargaining between the old, traditional gods (not to be confused with the God of the Bhagavad Gītā!) and men. The gods control benefits, and grant them in exchange for the gratifications of the sacrifice. It is man's duty to furnish these gratifications; otherwise he would be getting something for nothing. In this

[244] 3.12.

passage the Gītā unhesitatingly commends this system. It even says that actions of the sacrifice have no binding effect,[245] and that sacrificers "are freed from all evil," [246] although, to be sure, it adds that it is wicked to perform even such acts "selfishly,"[247]—a statement that is hardly consistent with the theory of the ritual cult just quoted, which seems to imply that the whole basis of it is a matter of selfish interest. The fact is, however, that this theory, which is inherited from Vedic times, is not ordinarily brought out clearly in the Gītā or in other later religious texts. It is more often ignored or slurred over. The Gītā contains passages in which sacrificial acts are spoken of as part of man's duty and to be performed simply *qua* duty—"abandoning attachment." [248] "Actions of sacrifice, alms, and penance are not to be abandoned; on the contrary they are to be performed. Sacrifice, alms, and penance are purifying for the wise. But even these actions are to be performed with abandonment of attachment and (of desire for) their fruits; that is my definite and final opinion." [249] "Sacrifice which is offered as prescribed by the rules, by men who are not seeking the fruits thereof, simply because it is their duty to sacrifice, concentrating their minds, that is perfect sacrifice." [250]

Otherwise it is possible by a mystic or symbolic interpretation of the word "sacrifice" to make it mean, or include, things which are quite different from commonplace ritual performance, and more in keeping with the general trend of the Gītā's teachings. In one passage we find indeed a statement which sounds like a thorough-going acceptance of the ritual dogma: "Those who eat the ambrosia of the leavings of the sacrifice go to the eternal Brahman. Not even this world, still less any other, is allotted to him who does not sacrifice." [251] But in the surrounding stanzas[252] the word "sacrifice" is interpreted as including many different kinds of religious practices: restraint of the senses, devotion to the Brahman, ascetic austerities, "disciplined activity" (*yoga*), study, and "knowledge"; and all these are recognized[253] as forms of "sacrifice" that have their validity. It is added that "the sacrifice of knowledge is better than material sacrifice; all action (karma) without exception is completely ended

[245] 3.9.
[246] 3.13.
[247] 3.13.
[248] 4.23.
[249] 18.5, 6.
[250] 17.11.
[251] 4.31.
[252] 4.23-33.
[253] 4.30.

in knowledge."[254] The "sacrifice of knowledge" means, of course, the intellectual method of salvation, and equally of course it has nothing whatever to do with ritual sacrifices. It is only by mystic symbolism that the term "sacrifice" can be applied to it at all.

On the other hand there are not wanting in the Gītā passages which definitely disparage the ritual religion. "Those who take delight in the words of the Veda" are called "lacking in insight," "full of desires, aiming at heaven"; their doctrines "entail rebirth and the fruits of actions," and are "replete with various rites leading to enjoyment and power."[255] "The Vedas belong to the realm of the three qualities (of material nature); be thou free from the three qualities!"[256] There is even appended to this passage a verse which appears to contain a bitterly ironical thrust at the priestly caste, whose selfish interests were concerned in the perpetuation of these Vedic rites which required the participation of hired brahmans: "As much profit as there is in a well into which waters flow from all sides, so much is there in all the Vedas for a wise brahman."[257] Such anti-clericalism is startling in a work like the Gītā, which in general avoids any formal break with the established religious and social order. It would be more natural in a Buddhist text. Yet we find not dissimilar expressions in older works which pass for orthodox.[258] And, if so pronounced a polemic attitude is exceptional, there are various other passages which treat the ritual religion with scant respect. A man who gets out of the "jungle of illusion" will become disgusted with the revealed religion or holy "tradition," and in turning against this holy "tradition" he will acquire discipline (*yoga*).[259] God's true form can never be known through religious works.[260] He does not reveal Himself to the adherents of the traditional cult, nor even to the gods to whom that cult is devoted, who long in vain for a sight of Him;[261] they know nothing of His nature and origin, and the seers (*rishis*) who are the reputed authors of the Vedic hymns are equally ignorant.[262]

[254] 4.33.
[255] 2.42, 43.
[256] 2.45.
[257] 2.46.
[258] It is therefore unnecessary to suppose that the verse 2.46 is to be understood seriously, not ironically—which would imply that it was an insertion put in by a believer in orthodox religion who desired to answer the preceding verses in disparagement thereof. While this theory is not impossible I regard it as unlikely.
[259] 2.52, 53.
[260] 11.48.
[261] 11.52, 53.
[262] 10.2, 14.

The orthodox cult is put in its place, so to speak, in the statement that "those who desire the full fruition of (ritual) acts sacrifice in this world to the gods." [263] That is, if you want the sort of thing that sacrifice is designed to accomplish, by all means sacrifice, and you will get it. It is a low sort of aim; but such as it is, if one honestly seeks it, he shall find it. And that precisely because of his sincerity and devotion to what he conceives, however mistakenly, to be his religious duty. "Those whose intelligence is obscured by reason of their desires for this or that (fruit of religious actions) resort to other deities (than Me); they take up various religious systems, being limited by their own natures." [264] If they are sincere, they get the fruit they seek; but it is the one true God, whom they know not, who gives it to them. "Whoever seeks to worship with true faith and devotion any other form (of deity), for him I make that same faith firm, and, being disciplined in that faith, he devotes himself to worship of that (form of deity), and obtains therefrom suitable desires, though it is none but I that grant them!" [265] True and righteous ritualists, "worshipping Me by means of sacrifices," duly succeed in gaining the sensuous heaven which is one of the traditional rewards of ritualism, and enjoy divine pleasures there.[266] But of course this is a very limited form of success. Such "heavenly" existences are finite; they belong to the round of rebirths just as much as do earthly human lives. When the effect of their religious merit is exhausted, such men fall to earth again.[267] All that has nothing to do with the real goal of man, which is release from *all* existence.

What is true of orthodox ritualism is true of all other sorts of religion. Any religion is better than none. Whole-hearted and unqualified condemnation is reserved for those "demoniac" (wicked) men who "say that the world is untrue, without any basis (religious principle upon which to rest), without God, not produced in orderly sequence, in short, governed by chance (or, by desire, lust)." [268] The "materialistic" school here referred to is accused by its opponents of having taught that all religion and philosophy were nonsense; that there was no guiding principle in the world; that all was chance; that the alleged moral law of the effect of deeds on the doer was baseless; that there was no soul, and no life after death; and that con-

[263] 4.12.
[264] 7.20.
[265] 7.21, 22.
[266] 9.20.
[267] 9.21.
[268] 16.8.

sequently the wise man was he who devoted himself to getting as much worldly enjoyment out of life as he could. Such doctrines are of course abhorrent to the Gītā, as to all the accepted forms of Hinduism. On the other hand, those who genuinely though erroneously worship other gods are really worshipping the true God, though they do not know it; and God accepts their worship, imperfect though it be. "Even those who are devoted to other deities and worship them, filled with faith, they too really worship Me, though not in correct fashion. For I am both the recipient and the lord of all worship (literally, 'of all sacrifices'). But they do not know Me aright. Therefore they fall." [269] "They fall"; that is, the "heavenly" rewards which they attain are finite, and upon the exhaustion of the merit acquired by their sincere though mistaken religious practices, they return to ordinary worldly life again. "But finite are these fruits which come to such ignorant men. Those who revere the (popular or ritualistic) gods go to the gods; those who revere Me go to Me." [270] So each religion brings its suitable reward. "Devotees of the gods go to the gods; devotees of the 'fathers' (spirits of the dead), to the 'fathers'; worshipers of the demons go to the demons; but My worshippers go to Me." [271] And, as the last paragraph shows, it is really through the one God that the followers of other religions gain their objects. Since those objects are necessarily imperfect and limited, because their seekers are by definition ignorant of the true goal of man, it remains true that one should "abandon all (other) religions" and make (the one true) God alone his refuge.[272]

[269] 9.23, 24.
[270] 7.23.
[271] 9.25.
[272] 18.66.

CHAPTER XI

Practical Morality

THE Gītā's attitude toward practical morality is characteristic of most Hindu religions. In its relation to the ultimate goal of salvation, morality is only a secondary means. It alone is never sufficient to achieve that goal. But on the other hand it leads to ever better and higher existences, and helps to prepare for final success.[273]

The importance of morality comes out most clearly on the negative side. Immorality is clearly regarded as a serious, indeed usually a fatal, hindrance. To be sure we are told that "if even a very wicked man worships Me with single devotion, he is to be regarded as righteous after all; for he is established in truth";[274] and again that "even if thou shouldst be the worst sinner of all sinners, thou shalt cross over all (the 'sea' of) evil merely by the boat of knowledge."[275] These passages suggest a sort of magic absolution from sin by devotion to God, or to knowledge, as the case may be. It might be inferred from them that it makes little or no difference what a man may do, so long as he succeeds in possessing himself of the key to salvation. This is, however, probably not a fair inference from the Gītā's words. In the first place we must remember that the Gītā is poetic in its language and not infrequently emphasizes its ideas by a certain overstatement. To drive home the importance of "devotion" or "knowledge" it attributes to each of them in turn the power to absolve from the most heinous sins. Secondly, the Gītā undoubtedly means to imply a reformation and repentance on the part of the sinner as a prerequisite, or at least concomitant, to the attainment of "devotion" or "knowledge." We are, indeed, told elsewhere in definite terms that wicked men cannot, in the nature of things, possess true devotion or knowledge either.

[273] 16.22.
[274] 9.30.
[275] 4.36.

"Wicked and deluded evil-doers do not resort to Me; their intelligence is taken away by delusion, and they remain in the 'demoniac' condition."[276] (We shall see what is meant by the "demoniac" condition in the next paragraph.) In another passage "knowledge" is defined at length in distinctly ethical terms; that is, he who is wise is necessarily also righteous, as Socrates said. Knowledge includes "freedom from haughtiness and deceit, harmlessness, patience, uprightness, devotion to one's teacher, purity, constancy, self-control, lack of interest in the objects of sense, unselfishness," and so forth; "indifference" and "devotion to God" are also included.[277] Again a description of the qualities of the perfected man, who is fit for union with Brahman, includes abstention from lust and hatred and from such vices as selfishness, violence, pride, desire, and anger.[278]

The sixteenth chapter of the Gītā is wholly devoted to a sort of practical moral code. It tells us that there are two kinds of "nature" or "condition" or "estate" of man, the "divine" and the "demoniac"; that is, the good and the bad, the sheep and the goats. The good estate tends towards emancipation, the bad towards continued bondage in existence.[279] That is, more explicitly, men who are bad or "demoniac" by nature are reborn again and again; they fail to reach God, and their fate is wretched,[280] while the good come finally to salvation.[281] The good are characterized by "fearlessness, purification of being, steadfastness in knowledge and disciplined activity (*yoga*), almsgiving, self-control, sacrifice, (religious) study, penance and uprightness; harmlessness, truth, freedom from anger, generosity, calmness, freedom from malice, compassion to all creatures, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, constancy; majesty, patience, fortitude, purity, non-violence, freedom from pride."[282] The characteristics of the wicked are described and illustrated at much greater length. In general they are, of course, the opposites of the qualities just mentioned. But emphasis is laid on the ignorance of the wicked,[283] on their materialistic and atheistic philosophy,[284] on their overweening pride and stupid self-confidence.[285] "Resorting to egotism, violence, arrogance, lust, and anger, they hate Me in their own bodies and those of others, these envious men";[286] that is, by their misdeeds they wrong God, who is in themselves and in other men. All their vices are finally traced to three primary vices, desire

[276] 7.15.
[277] 13.7-11.
[278] 18.51-53.
[279] 16.5.
[280] 16.20.
[281] 16.22.
[282] 16.1-3.
[283] 16.7.
[284] 16.8; cf. page 83f.
[285] 16.13ff.
[286] 16.18.

or lust, anger, and avarice, "a threefold gate to hell, destroying the soul."[287] He who is subject to them cannot hope for perfection or bliss.[288] In another passage desire or lust and anger are referred to as the twin causes of all vice.[289] This seems indeed sufficient, since avarice or cupidity is only a specialized form of desire or lust. "Desire and loathing" is the formula in other places.[290] And since "loathing" is merely negative desire, while "anger" or "passion" is only a pragmatic manifestation or result of desire, whether positive or negative, we find that in the last analysis "desire" is the root of all evil.[291]

One positive feature of the Gītā's morality deserves especial mention. As we saw above at the end of Chapter VII, the metaphysical doctrine that the one universal Soul is in all creatures furnishes an admirable basis for a very lofty type of morality. Since one's own Self or Soul is really identical with the Self or Soul of all other creatures,[292] therefore one who injures others injures himself. "For beholding the same Lord (the universal Soul) residing in all beings, a man does not injure himself (his own self in others) by himself; so he goes to the final goal."[293] Thus one of the most striking and emphatic of the ethical doctrines of the Gītā is substantially that of the Golden Rule. Man must treat all creatures alike, from the highest to the lowest,[294] namely like himself.[295] The perfected man "delights in the welfare of all beings."[296] This principle is usually regarded as perhaps the highest formulation of practical ethics that any religion has attained. It is interesting to see how naturally and simply it follows from one of the most fundamental tenets of the Gītā's philosophy.

A genuine application of this moral principle would seem almost inevitably to include avoidance of any violent injury to living beings. And, as is well known, most Hindu sects have in fact applied it in this way, at least in theory, and to a considerable extent in practice. "Non-violence" or "harmlessness" (*ahinsā*) has generally been accepted as a cardinal virtue. It finds expression for instance in the vegetarian diet which so many Hindus have always favored, and in the policy of pacifism and "passive resistance" which, while never adopted universally, has probably had more followers at every period in India than in most other lands.

[287] 16.21.
[288] 16.23.
[289] 3.37.
[290] E. g., 3.34.
[291] Cf. pages 21 and 58 above.
[292] 4.35; 5.7; 6.29, etc.
[293] 13.28.
[294] 5.18; cf. 6.9.
[295] 6.32.
[296] 5.25.

The Gītā's morality on this point is somewhat disappointing. It does indeed include "harmlessness" or "non-violence" (*ahinsā*) in several of its lists of virtues.[297] But it never singles it out for special emphasis. It seems to be content to let it lie buried in such more or less formal moral catalogs. One gets the impression that it was too prominent and well-recognized a virtue to be ignored; so some lip-homage is paid to it. But it is never definitely and sharply applied in such a form as "Thou shalt not kill." The Gītā contrasts strikingly in this respect with some other Hindu sects, such as the Buddhists and (still more) the Jains. It seems a little strange, at first sight, to find any Hindu religious text treating the doctrine of non-violence in so stepmotherly a fashion. But of course the reason is quite evident. The Gītā is hampered by the fact that it is supposed to justify Arjuna's participation in war. This dramatic situation is alluded to repeatedly, and the author seems to have it in the back of his head a large part of the time. To be sure, many of his doctrines are inconsistent enough with such a purpose, as we have abundantly seen. And we must not forget, either, that "non-injury" is clearly implied in the Gītā's teachings on the subject of unselfishness and doing good to others. That is, to carry out these teachings in any real sense would necessarily involve doing no harm to living creatures. But to lay a frank and full emphasis upon this principle, to follow it out explicitly to its logical conclusion, would mean to run so glaringly counter to the professed aim of the piece, that it is not strange that the author avoids doing so. Even his catholicity seems to have shrunk from such an inconsistency as that. We can hardly help feeling, however, that he lost a golden opportunity thereby.

[297] 13.7 and 16.2, quoted on page 86; also 10.5 and 17.14.

THIRD PART

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XII

Summary

First Part: Preliminary Chapters

Chapter I. *Introductory.*—The Bhagavad Gītā, the Bible of Krishnaism, is dramatically a part of the Mahābhārata. Its ostensible purpose is to prove to Arjuna, one of the heroes of that epic, the necessity and propriety of taking part in the battle which is the epic's main theme. In actual fact, it is a mystic poem, dealing with the nature of the soul and body of man, man's relation to God, and the way or ways by which man is to attain salvation. It is poetic, mystical, and devotional, rather than logical and philosophical. It contains many discordant ideas, and to try to unite them all in a consistent system is to do violence to its spirit. In this respect it is like all Hindu speculative literature of its time and earlier,—particularly like the Upanishads, to which it owes many of its ideas. Like them, too, it is practical in its attitude, seeking religious or philosophic truth not for its own sake but as a means of human salvation.

Chapter II. *The Origins of Hindu Speculation.*—Out of the ritualistic polytheism, based on nature-worship, of the Rig Veda, developed on the one hand the pure ritualism of the Brāhmana texts, on the other hand tentative speculations leading towards either monotheism or monism,—seeking to explain the constitution of the universe and of man in terms of a unitary principle. This unitary principle is at first often conceived concretely and physically; but with the passage of time the tendency is towards ever more abstract and metaphysical concepts, culminating in such expressions as "the Existent" (*sat*), or "the Self, Soul" (*ātman*). The influence of ritualistic concepts is also evident, particularly in the idea of the Brahman, the embodiment of the ritual religion, as a name for the prin-

ciple of the universe. From very early times the texts conceive a parallelism as existing between the universe, the macrocosm, and man, the microcosm.

Chapter III. *The Upanishads, and the Fundamental Doctrines of Later Hindu Thought.*—In the Upanishads this parallelism becomes an identity: the Soul of the universe is identified with the Soul of man. In them, too, we find the first clear statements of the basic axioms of later Hinduism, which may be summed up as follows. First, *pessimism:* all empiric existence is evil. Second, *transmigration,* with the doctrine of *karma:* all living beings are subject to an indefinite series of reincarnations, and the conditions of each incarnation are determined by the moral quality of acts performed in previous incarnations. Third, *salvation* lies in release from this chain of existences; it is to be gained primarily by *knowledge* of the supreme truth, which has a quasi-magic power of giving its possessor control over his destiny. As secondary or auxiliary means of salvation are mentioned morality, asceticism in some form or other, and devotion to a supreme being or prophetic personality. These seem originally to have been conceived as aids to the attainment of saving knowledge, and they have little importance in the Upanishads; but in various later sects one or another of them at times becomes so important as to obscure the originally primary aim of "knowledge."

Chapter IV. *Prehistory of the God of the Bhagavad Gītā.*—The Deity of the Gītā seems to be a blend of the impersonal Upanishadic Absolute with a popular god or deified hero, Krishna, who was identified with the Vedic god Vishnu. The combination thus formed contained, therefore, elements which could appeal to orthodox ritualists, to speculative intellectuals, and to the untutored masses.

Second Part: The Teachings of the Bhagavad Gita

Chapter V. *Soul and Body.*—All creatures are composed of two eternal and eternally distinct elements, soul and body. The body, which includes what we call psychic elements, is material; is subject to evolution, devolution, and change of all sorts; and consists of a blend of various qualities. The soul is immaterial, uniform, unchangeable, without qualities, and inactive. All action is performed by the material body, upon other material bodies or substances. The

soul neither acts nor is affected by action; indeed it is not affected by any influence outside of itself. It has only contemplative powers. Ordinary creatures, however, confuse body and soul, owing to the disturbing influence of the material organ of self-consciousness, and imagine that their souls act and suffer. The enlightened man realizes the true distinction between soul and body; his soul is thereby freed from the bondage of connection with the body, whence come action and suffering; and he attains release.

Chapter VI. *The Nature of God.*—God is conceived as the First Principle of the universe, the Soul of all; the highest or best part of all; the noblest aspect of all; immanent in all (sometimes even in what is considered evil, but sometimes only in what is considered good). God seems generally to be regarded as a principle distinct from either the soul or the body of individual beings, though they are all "in Him." He transcends the universe. Sometimes the Upanishadic Brahman seems to be identified with God; but at other times Brahman is distinguished from God, and is then ordinarily subordinated to Him. At times God is thought of dualistically; his "lower nature" is the empiric, material universe, his "higher nature" is supernal and beyond the ken of empiric creatures. God takes on individual incarnations to save the world of men; such an incarnation is Krishna. His supreme form is revealed only as a rare act of grace to His elect; such an act of grace is granted to Arjuna, who beholds God's very Self in a mystic vision.

Chapter VII. *Action and Rebirth.*—Any action, good or bad, must normally have its effect in continued existence for the doer. But the Gītā says that this is due not to the action as such, but to *desire* underlying the action. Acts performed with indifference to the results, without interest in the outcome, have no binding effect. It is therefore unnecessary to renounce action altogether. It is even improper to do so—as well as impossible. We cannot refrain from action if we would, and we should not if we could. Man must do his duty, without desire or fear of the consequences. Most often duty is not defined; we are told simply to do our duty *qua* duty, as a sort of categorical imperative, without selfish interest. At other times attempts are made to define duty in terms of religious or social requirements, or on the basis of the oneness of man with his neighbors and with God, from which is deduced the duty of treating others as oneself.

Chapter VIII. *The Way of Knowledge and the Way of Disciplined Activity.*—The Gītā distinguishes two schools of thought

which it calls Sānkhya and Yoga. By Sānkhya it means the doctrine of salvation through the power of perfect knowledge, implying withdrawal from the world and renunciation of actions. By Yoga it means the opposing doctrine that one should seek emancipation by unselfish performance of duty. Both of these doctrines are recognized as leading to salvation, and in particular the power of knowledge is fully admitted in various places. Nevertheless the Gītā usually prefers the way of "indifference in action" or "disciplined activity," which is spoken of as leading to knowledge, or else as bringing salvation directly, and more "easily" than the way of knowledge and inaction.

Chapter IX. *The Way of Devotion to God.*—This is a still "easier" way of gaining salvation, and is most favored of all in the Gītā, although it too is at times spoken of as bringing man to salvation indirectly, by perfecting him in "knowledge" or "discipline." By filling his being with love of God, and doing all acts as a service to God, man attains union with Him; that is, salvation. Sometimes God is spoken of as Himself intervening to help his devotees towards this goal. It is particularly important that man should fix his mind on God at the hour of death; this has a special tendency to bring the soul of the dying man to God.

Chapter X. *Attitude Towards Hindu Orthodoxy and Other Religious Beliefs.*—The Gītā contains some expressions that are distinctly hostile to the orthodox ritualistic religion. In general, however, it is tolerant of it, or even recommends the "disinterested" performance of its rites, as a matter of "duty." Towards rival religions in general its attitude is broad and tolerant; it admits a qualified validity to all acts of sincere religious devotion.

Chapter XI. *Practical Morality.*—While morality has only minor importance in the Gītā's scheme of salvation, immorality is usually regarded as a fatal obstacle to it. Desire is the most fundamental cause of vice. The most prominent specific ethical principle in the Gītā is that of doing good to others, treating others as oneself. Yet the injunction to do no harm to any living creature, though it is a logical inference from that principle and though it is very prominent in most Hindu ethical systems, is barely mentioned in the Gītā and receives no emphasis.

CHAPTER XIII

Conclusion

IT HAS been my purpose in this book to let the Bhagavad Gītā tell its own story in the main, with as little comment of my own as possible. However, the mere topical arrangement of the Gītā's materials is in itself an implied comment; for it is wholly foreign to the Gītā itself, which constantly juxtaposes unrelated matters and widely separates passages dealing with the same subjects. And it has seemed to me, after all, neither desirable nor possible to refrain from indicating the relations between the various doctrines of the Gītā as they appear to me.

Yet as I reread my account, I feel certain compunctions. I have an uneasy fear lest in presenting the letter of the Gītā I have allowed the spirit to escape. That spirit, as I understand it, is a peculiarly difficult thing to confine in words, especially in the words of a foreign language spoken by a people with a wholly foreign background of ideas. It is also difficult, in any language, to express this spirit while presenting the logical relations between the various ideas contained in the book. It might indeed be maintained, perhaps, that to present the book's ideas in logical relationship is to violate its spirit.

For, as we have now abundantly seen, the Gītā makes no attempt to be logical or systematic in its philosophy. It is frankly mystical and emotional. What we may, if we like, call its inconsistencies are not due to slovenliness in reasoning; nor do they express a balanced reserve of judgment. This is sufficiently proved in several cases by the fact that the Gītā deliberately brackets two opposing views and asserts the validity of both. It is only in the realm of logic that we must choose between yes and no, or else confess ignorance. The Gītā finds no difficulty in saying both yes and no, at the same time. For its point of view is simply unrelated to logic. Even what it calls "knowledge" is really intuitional perception; it is not, and is not intended to be, based on rational analysis. And, as we have seen, "knowledge" is not the Gītā's favorite "way of salvation." To the

Gītā, as to the Christian mystics, reason is an uncertain and flickering light. The truly "wise" man should abandon it wholly and follow the "kindly Light," the *lux benigna,* of God's grace. He must sink his personality in ecstatic devotion to God, trusting absolutely in Him, and throwing upon Him all responsibility, doing all deeds as "acts of worship" to God. In the long run nothing else matters. Of course, the Gītā differs from the Christian mystics in some of its fundamental doctrines; for after all it is a Hindu work, and shares the common Hindu axioms. Yet in the practical outcome of its teachings it is astonishing to see how close it comes to many of them. It recalls them in its mystical, anti-rational point of view; in its ardent, personal, devotional theism; in its subjectivity, its focusing of the attention within, to the exclusion of all interest in that which is outside the individual's soul ("the Kingdom of God is within you"); and in its conception of the final goal as complete union with God, a state of supernal and indescribable bliss and peace.

There is one other characteristic of the Gītā's teachings, which seems to me to show such good psychology that it might be commended to the consideration of the Christian mystics; whether it is paralleled in their expressions or not, I do not know. The Gītā, we have seen, values the emotional and the concrete above the rational and the abstract *because* they are "easier." It is less troublesome to feel than to think. I take it that it needs no argument to prove the truth of this claim. It is equally evident that doctrines imbued with this spirit might naturally be expected to win popularity. I have already suggested that the enormous following which the Gītā has always had in India may be due in large part to its readiness to meet the ordinary man on his own ground, to make salvation as easy as possible for him. Objection might be raised against such an attitude from the rationalistic point of view; the rationalist may say that what is easier for man to grasp is not necessarily truer or as true. But from the Gītā's mystical point of view a man is as he feels; if he feels united with God, he is—or at least he shall be—united with God. And, speaking pragmatically, the Gītā's position is justified by the fact that many millions of men have found religious comfort in it, and expected salvation through it. Who can say that they were disappointed? And if it should be granted that they were not, would not the Gītā have proved the usefulness of its doctrines, and so their pragmatic "truth"?

APPENDIX

On Some Translations and Methods of Interpretation of the Gita

There are numerous translations of the Gītā, in English and in most other European languages. The best in English from the literary point of view is Sir Edwin Arnold's, entitled *The Song Celestial;* it is included in the first volume of Arnold's *Poetical Works* (Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1892). This version does not aim at scholarly accuracy, and in details it often departs very widely from the original. In my opinion the best scholarly translation in English is that of K. T. Telang, entitled, *The Bhagavadgītā,* in the *Sacred Books of the East,* Volume VIII (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1882). This contains likewise an introduction and notes. Very valuable, in spite of some features which seem to me defects (and of which I shall speak presently), is the German translation, with introduction and notes, by Richard Garbe (*Die Bhagavadgītā,* Leipzig, Haessel, 1905; second edition, 1921; my references are to the first edition).

There are many points in the interpretation of the Gītā, both as a whole and in matters of detail, on which different opinions are held by different scholars. Attention has been called in my footnotes to a few of the more important instances. My desire has been to warn readers against accepting my opinions with absolute confidence in the case of all *important* matters on which different views are held by reputable Indologists. Since this book is intended for the general public rather than for specialists, I cannot do much more than this.

A method of interpreting the Gītā profoundly different from mine is exemplified in Professor Garbe's translation, mentioned above. Professor Garbe's eminently clear and logical mind is offended by the evident inconsistencies in the Gītā's philosophy. They seem to him to indicate that the Gītā is a composite work. He believes that the original kernel of it was a Sānkhya treatise, which

was worked over and expanded by an adherent of the Vedānta philosophy. He thinks that the Vedānta additions can be detected and eliminated; this is what his translation undertakes to do. He prints in small type what he regards as later additions; the large type represents his idea of the original Gītā. He finds a confirmation of his theory in this, that when the supposedly secondary passages are excluded, the "original" verses thus brought into juxtaposition seem to him to fit on to each other, forming a consecutive whole.

My objections to this theory may be grouped under three heads. The first and most fundamental one is that it seems to me based on modern, occidental, and rationalistic principles, which cannot be applied to a Hindu work of the age of the Gītā. What I mean by this will, I trust, be clear to anyone who has read this book; the whole book may be regarded as a general criticism of Garbe's theory. Secondly, Garbe's dissection eliminates only one group of philosophic inconsistencies in the Gītā; an important one, to be sure, but by no means the only one. Garbe himself is constrained to admit that there are others (see, e. g., his Introduction, pp. 43f., 50). On this point, too, my book furnishes abundant evidence. For instance, no possible dissection could eliminate the inconsistencies in the use of the term *yoga*.[298] Thirdly, it seems to me that Garbe is mistaken in thinking that the elimination of certain passages reunites verses which evidently belong together but have been separated by the alleged interpolations. I believe that just the opposite is often the case. That is, a verse immediately following a passage excised by Garbe can, in many cases, be shown to be connected with the excised passage, in such a way as to indicate that the latter must have been in existence when the former was composed. The proof of this proposition depends on philological evidence; this is not the place to present it.[299]

[298] See above, pages 66ff. Garbe recognizes the different uses of the term *yoga* in the Gītā, but regards as secondary ("umgedeutet," p. 44) its use in the sense of "disciplined activity determined by duty." He also regards the term *sānkhya* as meaning regularly what it means in later Hindu philosophy. To me it seems reasonable to take as basic the passages in the Gītā in which the words *sānkhya* and *yoga* are formally joined and contrasted with each other. In all such passages it seems to me obvious that *sānkhya* is applied to the quietistic method of pure "knowledge" with abstention from activities, *yoga* to the method of activity with indifference to results. These, then, must be regarded as the Gītā's basic interpretations of the two words; and they are evidently very different from the connotations attached to them later. All this, of course, is parenthetical at this point. Whatever may be the standard or original meaning of the word *yoga*, it is admitted by Garbe that it is used in very different senses in unquestionably original parts of the Gītā.

[299] I had intended to publish it separately in a philological journal. I have, however, been largely anticipated by the late lamented Professor Oldenberg of

The importance of Garbe's work on the Gītā seems to me to lie in his penetrating philological analysis of the meaning of the individual stanzas. In this respect his translation has no superior in any language. I have profited greatly by his learning and acumen, and so, I am sure, have all serious students of the Gītā. His theory of the composition of the poem does not in the least affect the value of his book in this respect, which I wish to emphasize especially because of my strong dissent from that theory.

My own interpretation tacitly assumes the unity of the Gītā. There seems to me to be no definite reason for any other assumption. It is certain, at any rate, that for many centuries the Gītā has been handed down as a unit, in practically the form in which it now exists. The sanctity which the text acquired in the eyes of the Hindus has protected it to an extraordinary degree from textual corruptions. Variant readings in the manuscripts are virtually nonexistent.[300] There is absolutely no documentary evidence that any other form of the Gītā than that which we have was ever known in India. This, of course, does not prove that none ever was known; but it leaves a strong burden of proof upon those who maintain such a theory. They must show that the Gītā is quite exceptional among works of its class; whereas it seems to me, on the contrary, that its general character is very similar to that of the nearly contemporary Upanishads. The fact that the Gītā is imbedded in the Mahābhārata, which is known to contain many interpolations, is not to the point. The Mahābhārata as a whole never acquired a religious position like the Gītā's; it exists in widely different versions,—versions which differ in the inclusion or omission of many extensive passages,—and

Göttingen, in his article entitled "Bemerkungen zur Bhagavadgītā," in the *Nachrichten von der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen,* 1919, pp. 321-338 (this subject is treated on pages 328ff.). This article contains several of the examples which I intended to use, and some others. It also contains an admirable critique of Garbe's theory from the standpoint expressed in the first of my objections above. I am glad to find that so high an authority as Oldenberg felt as I do that the general spirit of the Gītā is no less unitary than that of similar works of its class, and that it is an error to see in it a mixture of different schools of philosophy. I am less impressed by some of the positive points made in Oldenberg's article, particularly by his view that the last six chapters of the Gītā are an addendum or addenda. Much of his argumentation on this point seems to me as subjective and improbable as Garbe's. I cling to the view that there is no reason to suppose that any considerable part of the Gītā was added after it left the hands of the original author. Oldenberg's article appeared during the war, and although it had been available in this country for some time, it had escaped my notice until this book was completely ready for the printer. It has, however, not caused me to make any changes, except for the addition of this note and the deletion of the promise to print the philological evidence referred to above.

[300] Telang, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

its text is in very many places full of corruptions and manuscript variations; while the Gītā is textually a clearly defined unit and its numerous manuscripts show practically no real variants.

Yet I would not be understood as asserting that there are no interpolations in the Gītā. Before it acquired its present odor of sanctity, which has kept it for so many centuries substantially free from changes of any sort, it must have lived through a human, undeified period, so to speak; and it is entirely possible that during that period some additions may have been made to it. I suppose that every careful student of the Gītā is likely to develop suspicions about occasional verses or passages. But the grounds for such suspicions must, in the nature of things, be subjective and tenuous. In no case can they be regarded as approximating scientific demonstration. And, in particular, the fact that a given verse or passage is logically inconsistent with other passages in the Gītā constitutes, in my opinion, absolutely no reason for suspecting that it is unoriginal. If my book has not shown that, it has failed indeed.

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